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Injunction stalls reform of Newfoundland's church-related school system

Alan Doerksen

ST. JOHN'S, Nfld. — Another twist has occurred in the Newfoundland government's attempt to change that province's denominational school system.

In early July, a judge approved an injunction requested by the Roman Catholic Church and Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland to stop the closing or restructuring of most of their schools. The ruling could disrupt the fall school term, and raises questions about the validity of changes already made to the school system.

Chaos exaggerated

In his ruling, Mr. Justice Leo Barry sided mostly with the Pentecostal and Catholic applicants, who argued that their right to run uni-denominational schools has been infringed upon, and that irreparable damage would be done if interdenominational schools are introduced.

Barry asserted, "Both sides present doomsday scenarios. The respondents [provincial government] ... claim the school system will be in chaos if they are forced to change plans now finalized for September 1997, because those plans are based upon decisions concerning the closure of certain schools, the assignment of teachers, the transfer of students and the content of courses."

On the other hand, "The applicants claim that, if the matter must await trial... it will not be practically possible to restore a truly denominational system of education if it is dismantled as of Sept. 1, 1997."

But while defending the rights of uni-denominational schools, Barry was also critical of their ability to deliver good quality education. "Having uni-denominational schools does not always lead to the best allocation of resources or best concentration of students in a particular school. Thus there is a cost to maintaining even a partial denominational education system."

But he notes that Parliament and the Newfoundland legislature have agreed to keep such a system: "Once the legislature has accepted that cost by enshrining the right to a uni-denominational school in the Constitution, government cannot then turn around and effectively take away this right by subordinating it completely to ... cost and efficiency."

Barry also objected to transitional, appointed, rather than elected, school boards. "A trial judge will probably conclude the boards and their designation process are unconstitutional."

COURTESY BONAVENTURE FAGAN

Bonaventure Fagan, of Newfoundland's Catholic Education Commission, was one of those who asked for the injunction.

Barry concluded, "I believe the applicants have a greater likelihood of success at trial than the respondents." He agreed that granting an injunction could disrupt the school system, but argued, "I do not accept that this will necessarily mean long-term dislocation of students from classes."

Bonaventure Fagan, executive director of the Catholic Education Commission (in Newfoundland), was one of those who requested the injunction. "We're very pleased," says Fagan. "We felt we had a solid case."

Fagan is critical of the changes Newfoundland made to the school system in the past two years. "A lot of the changes were not entirely valid," he says.

One of the terms by which Newfoundland became part of Canada in 1949 was that its denominational school system would remain intact.

But former premier Clyde Wells and present premier Brian Tobin have been determined to "reform" the school system. In September 1994, Wells announced his intentions and met

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Church's education consultants offer help to any local CRC that asks

Program's new leader 'phones home' to Grand Rapids from Albuquerque

JESSIE SCHUT

Sherry Ten Clay (third from left), co-ordinator of the Christian Reformed Church's church education consultants (CECs), is surrounded by some of those consultants at their recent conference: (from left) Sue Kuipers, from Kalamazoo, Mich.; Karen Wynbeek, from Cupertino, Calif.; and Marcia Vandergaast from Ottawa (far right).

Marian Van Til

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. — The Christian Reformed Church in North America has a couple of dozen dedicated souls who have become an "institution" in the denomination.

You may never have heard of these people, but the work they do is obvious Sunday after Sunday in Christian Reformed congregations across the continent, and in hundreds of other congregations as well.

They are part of the CRC Education Department's church education consultant program, developed 21 years ago at the same time as the *Bible Way* curriculum in order to "give church school teachers ongoing support," says the current co-ordinator of training and consulting, Sherry Ten Clay.

"This program is unique," says Ten Clay. "It provides curriculum and teaching support, free of charge, and has a dozen workshops, presented for a small fee [$5 an hour per person], on things such as how to tell stories, how to ask questions [of children], and on nurturing one's own faith."

There are currently 19 consultants, with openings for six more. "We like to hire people with a background in education," says Ten Clay, and many of the consultants are former teachers.

Consultants work more by region than by classes because CRC Publications materials are used not only by most of the 987 congregations in the CRC, but by hundreds of parishes in 20 other denominations as well. In fact, the CRC congregations make up only 25 per cent of CRC Publications' church education materials accounts.

While only one consultant has been involved for the entire life of the consulting program — a Canadian, Eldean Kamp, from Guelph, Ontario — the commitment of these church members is unflagging. They are considered contract employees of the CRC, but are paid only for workshop

See **CONSULTANT** *p. 2...*

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Newfoundland must backtrack on education changes

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with strong criticism from Newfoundland's churches. A year later, the government held a referendum in which 55 per cent of those who voted favored changing the system. But Fagan notes that only 52 per cent of eligible voters voted in that referendum.

In December 1996, Parliament approved a change to the Constitution, in accordance with the wishes of Newfoundland's government.

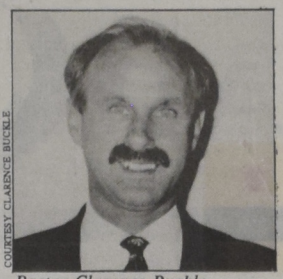
Adversarial model

Fagan objects to the introduction of interdenominational school boards. Each board has trustees at large and denominational trustees, representing the Catholic, Pentecostal and "integrated churches" (which include the Anglicans, Salvation Army, United and Presbyterians). These three groupings each have a committee connected with each school board as well.

This new system "has not worked well," Fagan comments. "It's turned out to be an adversarial model." Although the Catholic and Pentecostal representatives tend to work well together, there is conflict between them and representatives of the integrated churches.

In two years, the government has closed 35 or 40 schools in the province. Fagan believes the injunction will force the government to re-open these schools.

But he doesn't want a complete return to the previous system. "We look for a fair system," he says. No one should be forced to go to a Catholic school, for example, but [parents] should [be] allowed a choice of what school to send their children to.



COURTESY CLARENCE BUCKLE

Pastor Clarence Buckle

The injunction is just the first part of the Catholic and Pentecostal challenge to the Newfoundland government, says Fagan. This fall, the churches may take further court action.

On July 14, two of the church groups and the government met with Barry to discuss implications of his ruling.

A concern of the Pentecostals was that the government would close more of their schools unless there was an injunction, explains Clarence Buckle, general secretary of the province's Pentecostal Assemblies.

Worried about cost

If the fall term is delayed, it will be the government's responsibility, says Buckle. He believes the school system needs to be reformed, but argues that the government has been focused mainly on reducing costs by closing schools and almost halving the number of school boards. He says the churches have been trying to reform the system for several years.

Although Justice Barry was critical of the quality of unidenominational education, Buckle insists, "Our students do well. They're very successful."

Like Fagan, Buckle says there has been some conflict between his church and the integrated churches.

Pentecostals asked the government for a minimum representation of one member for each school board, but the government refused. The integrated churches sided with the government in that case. But Buckle adds that the integrated churches supported the request for an injunction.

The Newfoundland government is considering the repercussions of the injunction. Carl Cooper, a spokesperson for the Newfoundland Department of Education, says, "We're in court for clarification of the reports."

Education Minister Roger Grimes said his province will seek co-operation from key groups in education to "provide the least possible amount of disruption in the school system."

B.C. government shelves controversial labor bill

Alan Doerksen

VICTORIA, B.C. — After a great outcry from business, small unions and the Liberals, B.C.'s NDP government has decided to withdraw and reconsider controversial Bill 44.

The bill would have made it easy for workers to join unions affiliated with the Building Trades Council but would have frozen out workers who were not unionized or affiliated with smaller unions such as the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC).

Labor Minister John Cashore asserted that the bill was withdrawn because "labor and business representatives have indicated concern about some aspects of the legislation and the process by which it was developed. Our goal is to take a sober second look..., to do a thorough consultation ... to ensure that proposed changes have been properly considered."

Those proposed changes will be referred to two review panels. Cashore says both panels have a mandate to consult widely with business and labor. They will deliver their recommendations to Cashore by Dec. 31.

Denied choice

Neil Roos, B.C. director for CLAC, says the government deserves some credit for reconsidering Bill 44. "Clearly it's important that the law supports workers in their right to belong to, and be represented by, the trade union of their choice. Bill 44's fatal flaw was to deny that choice to construction workers and therefore could not proceed in its present form."

He adds, "We have assured Minister Cashore that we will participate fully and constructively in the consultation process." CLAC represents more than 6,000 workers in B.C., about 3,000 of whom work in the construction industry.

Ray Pennings, CLAC's publicity and promotion's director, says the bill would have seriously damaged CLAC's B.C. wing. "Our very existence was at stake."

Pennings says the government "hadn't counted on the outcry. The business community was successful in tying this legislation to job loss [and] threatened withdrawal of investment." Another factor was "the perception that Clark was repaying political debts."

B.C. Liberal Leader Gordon Campbell says, "Glen Clark and the NDP promised that employers would be consulted over the make-up of these review panels, and that never happened. Bill 44 isn't even cold yet and the NDP is already stacking the deck in favor of the big unions for next year's Labor Code changes.... The fact is, the NDP did not ask anyone in the business community who should be sitting on this labor review panel."

John van Dongen, Liberal MLA for Abbotsford, strongly criticizes the NDP for introducing Bill 44 in the first place. "The government admitted they hadn't done any kind of consultation with the business community," he says. They consulted only their "friends in labor." He calls that "tremendously arrogant." He sees a "very direct linkage" between the bill and Clark's allies in the labor movement.

Van Dongen believes the bill isn't dead yet. "The government is going to bring this back in pretty much the same form," he says. He notes that Bill 44 was contrary to a recommendation made earlier by Stephen Kelleher and Vince Ready, both of whom will be part of the review process for the bill.

Some union leaders are upset by the bill's shelving, reports the *Globe and Mail*. Ken Georgetti, president of the B.C. Federation of Labour, says, "We are very disappointed that workers who need help from the government have been let down by the hysterical anti-union attitude of business."

Peter Norris, president of the Provincial Council of Carpenters, also expressed his disappointment with the government for "caving in to pressure."

Consultant offers long-distance help

... continued from page 1

and consulting time, not the hours they spend in preparation.

The consultants met July 10-13 in Grand Rapids, Mich., for their 21st annual conference, whose theme was "Come as a Child." The conference brought together 17 of the 19 consultants from across the U.S. and Canada, and the lone consultant from Australia.

This conference was Sherry Ten Clay's first as co-ordinator of the program. For two decades Cele Mereness was the co-ordinator. She worked out of the denomination's American headquarters in Grand Rapids. After Mereness' retirement, in January 1997 Sherry Ten Clay took over in what will be a kind of long-distance experiment: she lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

The church has set up a telephone 800-number for Ten Clay which can be used by the consultants and anyone in church education who needs to contact her.

"The people I lead don't live in Grand Rapids either," Ten Clay notes, "so whether I'm next door or 2,000 miles down the road doesn't matter much. I use e-mail a lot too, and fax."

Ten Clay will commute to Grand Rapids four times a year, a week at a time (longer in the summer) for brainstorming and organizing. Ten Clay was herself a consultant for 13 years, and before that, a school teacher.

She grew up in the Reformed Church in America, where her father was a pastor. She joined the CRC, reluctantly, she admits, 20 years ago when she and her husband lived in Kansas City, where there was no RCA. She laughs at the irony of that fact that she now works for the CRC and is "fully ensconced" in the Christian Reformed Church.

Seeing our commonality

Ten Clay admits that her ostensibly half-time job has become something more than 20 hours a week, but she wouldn't trade it. "I really do love this," she says enthusiastically.

"I've traveled to so many churches. I can see our commonality. I hear the same concerns, same hopes and dreams. And I love connecting people to people; I think that's fun. And I love getting together with the consultants in the summer...."

That's a two-way street, as evident in the accompanying personal account by CC regional reporter Jessie Schut, who is also one of the CRC education consultants. (*See page 3.*)

Church education 'ain't what it used to be' (thankfully)

Jessie Schut

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. — The teenaged waiter at Arnie's, a popular eatery in Grand Rapids, Mich., was puzzled. He watched his two middle-aged women customers animatedly talking and laughing. He caught snatches of their conversation and couldn't believe his ears! Surely these women couldn't be talking about church education. They were enjoying themselves too much.

"Are you really Sunday school teachers?" he asked the two women, who were church education consultants for CRC Publications. "Boy, Sunday school must have changed a lot since I was a kid!"

Yes, church education has changed. There are many more colorful materials to use as study guides. And formats and methods have changed too.

Thousands of Christian Reformed adults share a collective memory of catechism classes, perhaps the only church education classes they attended. The times and locations may have differed, but the setting was the same: in some damp church basement, chairs were set up in rows and dozens of gangly high school kids reluctantly filed in.

When the teacher (almost always the pastor) began asking students to recite their Heidelberg Q & A's, he almost always started with the poor kid who sat in the front left-hand corner seat. The recitations were chanted in order; kids in the other rows could figure out which question they'd be asked, and sneak peeks at the answer in their half-hidden compendium before their turn was up.

Vital lessons

Most of us didn't like catechism, but it was important. The church said so, the pastor said so, our parents said so. And we did get to see our friends; so we went. I can still recite Lord's Day One from memory; and the older I get, the more it means to me. But was memorization of questions and answers about abstract concepts the best way to teach spiritual truths?

I believed, even then, that there must be better ways to work out all the questions I had about God. Perhaps that's why, when still a teenager myself, I began to teach Sunday school. Perhaps that's why I'm now a Church Education Consultant (CEC) in northern Alberta for CRC Publications. I meet with teachers, give workshops, help education committees make plans for the future. And I was one of those women at Arnie's, laughing and talking with a friend about church education.

Church education is a vitally important ministry, and it can be a truly joyful one. At its best, there's nothing like it for encouraging a "seeker" to make a commitment to Christ, and for challenging committed Christians to grow in the knowledge and experience of their faith.

JESSIE SCHUT

Rev. Bob De Moor, previously of Edmonton and now editor-in-chief for the CRC's Education Department in Grand Rapids, Mich., cooks up a batch of ideas for future church education materials.

A large study by the nonprofit Lilly Foundation questioned 11,000 people in six major denominations to determine what had an impact on people's faith development. Of the many variables, an effective church education program came second only to family nurturing.

The word "effective" is the key. How many churches have an effective program, and what makes it so? And how much do other church members know about it?

These topics arose repeatedly at the consultants' meeting in Grand Rapids in July. Because CECs are invited into churches all across North America they have become eyes and ears for the Grand Rapids-based offices. Their observations about the state of education in the churches are taken seriously by those who plan curriculum and other publications.

While the materials and teaching techniques of church education have changed a lot, church education still doesn't have a very good image, and that's too bad — church education programs have been a mainstay of the Reformed faith since the days of John Calvin. Lately, however, it seems Reformed churches are losing sight of their rich heritage in this area.

Arlene Martin of Boulder, Col., says the most frequent question she encounters as a CEC is: "How do you recruit new teachers? And how do you keep them happy, so they'll stay?"

Increasingly teachers are willing to commit only to a limited time slot, such as a 13-lesson quarter of material. But most students do their best learning only after they've established a trusting relationship with the teacher, and that takes time.

Making an eternal difference

Teachers often don't realize that they are involved in a tremendously influential ministry, one that can make an eternal difference in the life of the student. The education program, Martin feels, doesn't receive much attention, especially if it's running relatively smoothly.

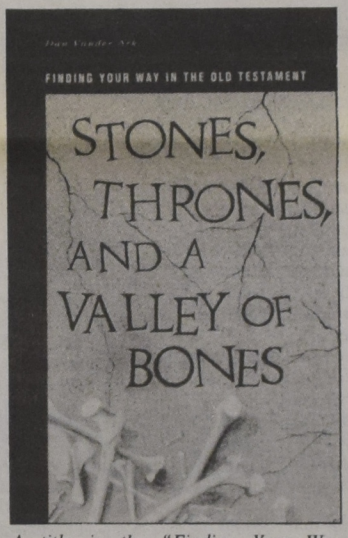
Rarely does church education get a spot on a classis agenda; if a CEC is fortunate enough to be invited to speak, it's usually the 10-minute time slot before lunch. One superintendent told a CEC that she had been recruited for her position by the pastor, who told her "there wasn't much to the job": she had to order materials and make sure the kids were divided into classes. Of course, she found it involved a whole lot more, with very little support or help from others.

Another observation CECs made: they are ready and eager to give workshops or meet with church education committees, but many churches don't take advantage of this service. Congregations may spend thousands of dollars on good curriculum, but those materials won't be as effective if the teachers are untrained.

Fewer than 10 per cent of churches who order materials through CRC Publications book a training session for their teachers. However, those who do attend workshops speak highly of the skills they learn. In their evaluations, they mention the value of meeting together with other teachers, reaffirming their common commitment, and picking up ideas and techniques that make teaching more rewarding.

CRC Publications staff commissioned a study on church education programs for teenagers. What they found was that teens say they learn best through games, service projects and group discussions; they rated large group lecture presentations as least effective. Yet that was the method used most often. Perhaps those teaching this age group are teaching the way they were taught, not realizing how many other ways there are to present material.

CECs are very aware that teaching church school classes is an enormous challenge. Teachers are competing with the colorful and highly produced visual presentations to which the "Disney generation" has become accustomed.



A title in the "Finding Your Way Through the Old Testament" series, one of CRC Publications' foundational courses aimed at high schoolers.

Often teachers feel like they're on the losing end of the comparison. But Disney kids need more than visual stimulation. They need to know that the spiritual truths taught in the Bible, the faith of their mothers and fathers, is true, and they need to hear it from teachers who love to tell the old, old story.

That's demonstrated in a story one CEC told about a teacher in her area. The teacher was frustrated with her class of 10- and 11-year-olds, mostly boys. The kids were, to put it kindly, livewires. Half of her time was spent trying to keep their mouths in check so she could get a word in edgewise. No matter how many creative ideas she came up with, they always had one that was even better, or so they thought.

The class never covered anywhere near the material for a lesson. Halfway through the year, she began to wonder if she was doing anything worthwhile.

Then something interesting began to happen. When she came to church, two or three boys would be waiting for her in the foyer, wondering what they'd be doing that day. When she had to cancel a class, they were indignant. One of them phoned her for a ride when his parents were sick. The classes didn't go a lot better, but she began to love those kids.

'Seeing the Spirit'

During one of the last classes of the season, the group was talking about the Holy Spirit and making a comparison of the Holy Spirit to wind and fire. One boy suggested that, like wind, the Holy Spirit is invisible. "That's not true," said another fellow. "You can see the Holy Spirit."

The teacher was surprised. "Really? Have you seen the Holy Spirit?"

"Yes," he said sincerely. "Sure. I can see the Holy Spirit in you — in the way you smile at us, and the way you put up with us when we're not very nice." Then he matter-of-factly continued to work on his assignment, not realizing what a gift he'd given to his teacher. He had captured the essence of the joy of teaching by uttering a few simple words. The hours of frustration and doubt were as light as thistledown in comparison.

When the teacher related this story to another CEC, she concluded, "I'll be committed to these kids forever. They don't know it, but they've got my heart."

And that's what church education is all about, after all.

(See related story, p. 8, on improving your church ed program.)

Guest Editorial

Journeying into the wilderness in search of God

Michael Geisterfer

There are two types of camping, just as there are two ways of approaching the Eternal.

The first is easy and straightforward. You get in your car, travel for as long as you can possibly stand it, and preferably on roads as bumpy and remote as they come, and then you pitch your tent among some trees and not too far from the beach. If you need ice, you go down to the campstore to get some; and then you unpack your aluminum lawn chair and breathe the fresh forest air.

That's one way of doing it. It's fairly effective if your goal is to experience nature without getting your feet too wet. You can, if you concentrate, feel the pulse of life beating all around you. But if it rains, you can hop in the car and go to the Pizza Hut in Grand Bend, or wherever it is you happen to be camping.

Nature is handed to you on a silver platter, with clearly described rules and regulations: a camping spot with your own little permit, marked trails with pictures of all the plants you can see along the way, and beaches with lifeguards and lots of other people to keep you company.

There is, however, another way of going about all of this. In this scenario there is still a car, but it's left far behind as you paddle your Kevlar canoe deep into the heart of the wilderness. All that you take with you is what you can carry on your back, your only guide a rough map of the lakes and streams in the region.

For me, this is by far the preferable journey, a religious sojourn as much as it is a much-needed vacation. With three youngsters in tow, my wife and I spend about two weeks each summer wilderness canoeing, on routes that sometimes allow us to travel for days without seeing another person.

Remarkable things happen on these trips. The children stop fighting among themselves and begin co-operating. Our own anxiety levels diminish and often disappear. When it rains, we find shelter in the lee of a rock and let it rain.

Communing with nature

There is something quite sacred about our sojourn in the wilderness. In the stillness of the night, after the children have been tucked in bed and the fire is just a dim glowing ember in the hushed darkness, it is as if one's senses cease trying to perceive outer stimuli and turn inward instead, listening to the otherwise imperceptible heartbeat of the Universe itself.

It is in this profound stillness that I feel closest to God, and, ironically, to myself. "Know yourself," John Calvin once wrote, "and you will know God." It is true.

Sometimes after a long day of canoeing and portaging, I'll leave Margit and the kids on the shore of our temporary home in the wilderness and paddle across the lake until I can no longer hear their animated voices across the water. I'll let the canoe glide until all movement ceases, the only sound the humming of the myriad mosquitoes in the woods and my own breathing. Then, like a connoisseur imbibing a rare French wine, I'll savor the silence, letting its waves roll over my ears, cleansing them from the layers of accumulated noise of the human world.

For a few seconds I'll experience a strange sensation, as if I am but an echo of my surroundings, an extension of the lakes and trees around me, as if they were in me and I in them. This sensation is fleeting, like an epiphany that disappears almost the moment it crystallizes.

Be still, and know that I am God.

The fear of the unconverted

A few Sundays ago I was speaking with a friend after church about the great joys of wilderness camping. She is herself an avid roadside camper, and has been for years. Like myself, she probably grew up among roadside campers and probably viewed it, as I used to, as the only valid path to experiencing nature.

With the zeal of a born-again convert, I found myself extolling the virtues of the wilderness when suddenly I noticed a strange expression in her eyes. Fear. Terror, almost. I could tell that I was inadvertently treading on painful territory.

There is not a strong tradition of contemplative prayer or mysticism in the Dutch Calvinist tradition. It was one of the many things that got thrown out with the bathwater during the Reformation. Not surprisingly, the only contemporary practitioners of the art were both Catholic and have both been silenced by death. Thomas Merton and Henri Nouwen both advocated silence and contemplation as a viable path to knowing God. Ironically, both had a terrible battle in their own lives putting down their pens and shutting up their own inner streams of wisdom. Words, words, words, my father once said in exasperation. There are too many words in this world.

These words are, of course, part of the noise of our world, religious or otherwise. Our religious lives are so often filled with doctrines, precepts, differing beliefs and interpretations of Scripture that it is easy to think that all of this *noise* is the essence of the religious life. But is it?

When wilderness campers leave the shore of civilization behind, they do so with a profound respect for the sanctity of nature. They do not attempt to define it in strict terms, or make it bend to their expectations. Rather, they allow themselves to be defined by it. If it rains, they let it rain.

Defining God

Yet what of the fear I saw in my friend's eyes when I spoke to her of the wilderness? What is it that causes us to recoil from the very thing that could give us life? Is it the fear that if we were to suddenly cease our obsessive observance of the outer trappings of the Law, that there would be nothing there? That God might not even exist?

The older I get, the more compassionate I feel towards people who are imprisoned by doctrinal belief. If this is the essence of their religious journey, if this is all they have, then they will fight for it to the death. Still, it leaves me with a sense of pathos. If this is all there is, the church will die.

There must be a balance in all things, particularly in our relationship with God. Doctrines and beliefs do have their place in the spiritual journey; yet they are not points of arrival, but rather, significant markers along the way. They may help us define who we are, but we are kidding ourselves if we believe they offer a definition of who God is.

Defining God is creating an oxymoron, like trying to capture wind in a glass jar. Yet we *can* know who he is. Not necessarily through words or gestures, or through complex and incomprehensible theological systems, but through silence — the simple act of shutting up and listening with our inner ears to the voice of God.

This is not as terrifying a prospect as some might believe. God does exist, and he even exists outside of the religious paradigms we have created. I have heard his voice out in the wilderness on a lonely outcropping of rock on some distant lake somewhere, and though his words carry no sound, his language is unmistakable.

It is the voice of Love.

Michael Geisterfer is a writer and journalist who lives in Aylmer, Quebec.

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Letters

Some outside the church are shut out

Your editorial from June 6, "The sin of pride and why some men reject the gospel," prompted a deep response from me. "Losing interest in the church" seems to be, for you, synonymous with "losing interest in the message of salvation through Christ." This seems too simplistic for me in the light of my father's history and experience being an alcoholic in the CRC. At present he is 82, in recovery, and attends weekly AA meetings faithfully. He has not faithfully attended any church for the past eight years. He has struggled for most of his life in the institutional church, which had consistently been out of step with his problems, in spite of some well-intentioned attempts to help him deal with his alcoholism. He has great respect for many people within the church, as well as friends and family, but has chosen to remain outside the fellowshipping Body of Christ in the local church.

I don't for one minute believe that he has abandoned his solid faith in God. If anything, he is all the more humbly assured of his salvation by sheer grace than ever before in his life, particularly since taking a vow of sobriety before God and us, his family. I can't imagine Christ looking on him as a proud Pharisee and being indifferent to his pain. On the contrary, my dad has pleaded upon, and knows, the mercy of God.

Closed from the inside

No doubt each person who no longer finds fellowship in the church needs to honestly and responsibly look at the pride that keeps him or her away: my dad is no exception. But we need to see that the door to the local church, the fellowshipping Body of Christ, can be closed from the inside as well as the outside. Judgment, intolerance, misunderstanding, self-righteousness, condemnation, ignorance and, yes, pride are also rampant on the inside.

The noise of the door that slams from the inside is often louder than the soft gradual click by the person who turns away. He or she leaves, but is also left. The "hurts of proud people" are just that: hurts. Far too often the "isolated" have been isolated through a complex series of attitudes and circumstances over a long period of time.

Well-intentioned Christians, especially those who may have unwittingly fallen out of touch with their own desperate need of grace, have done damage in the church, as have well-meaning but somewhat myopic and uninformed clergy. Perhaps because we can't "fix it" we in the church have long turned a blind eye to the real needs of addicted people, particularly alcoholics.

I believe that for alcoholics, AA is a must: sanctuary, understanding and accountability are found there like nowhere else. Period. The church cannot and should not try to replace it. But the church, we fellow travellers on the road of sanctification, can offer each other the acceptance, love, encouragement and forgiveness of Christ.

We all have stories, don't we? We may not struggle with alcoholism, but what are those sins that beset us? Let's take off our masks of "respectability at all costs" and start listening to and behaving authentically toward one another, rejoice in the good God has done in our hearts and lives, confessing and repenting of the sin that still clings (especially pride) as we journey together on the path of hope, reconciliation and renewal by grace.

Beggars looking for the same bread

Aren't we all beggars looking for the same bread? Don't we all find grace, comfort, hope and joy in Christ who paid for it all and who fully satisfies?

My father's story has validity because he is God's child. His story within the church is not just valuable: it is essential because dozens like him in any church struggle with similar addictions, mostly in secret and with imposed shame, and they need special help with their pride from someone who has "been there" like them.

Empathy and compassion are my father's spiritual gifts. My prayer is that the Spirit of God will enable him to walk back into the church to use them: through open doors and the encouragement of open hearts.

Name withheld
Calgary

Adoption laws should favor children and adoptive parents

The heartwarming story about two birth-sisters meeting each other for the first time at ages 28 and 29 prompted me to write about today's adoption policies (CC, July 4).

I'm the mother of an adopted daughter who, incidentally, was baptized in 1969 by the same pastor, Arie VandenBerg, mentioned in your story. He was our guest minister that Sunday in April, and I'll never forget his words after the baptism: "Today a little seven-month-old sister has been added to our congregation."

Our daughter, now married and the mother of three little boys, can identify with Sharon and Sue, for she also felt the need to find out more about her own roots after the birth of her first child. We are also the proud grandparents of an adopted grandson. But how hard it is today for childless couples to adopt, compared to some 30 years ago!

Long, long wait

Back then, you seldom waited more than two years before your child arrived, and you rarely worried about the possibility of the birth-mother reclaiming her child. Abortions were not performed very frequently, birth-mothers did not receive government financial support and there was still a stigma attached to being a single mother — all making an unwed mother think seriously about giving up her child at birth.

Today, if you want to adopt a baby through Children's Aid you may look at a waiting period of up to 10 years. Many childless couples opt for private adoptions and are prepared to pay $6,000-$8,000 in expenses. Yet this can also take several years.

Our daughter-in-law and son struggled with infertility and were told by their social worker to try and find a child themselves.

But when, after years of praying and waiting, "the call" finally comes, joy is mixed with fear. Will the birth-mother change her mind? It has happened to many hopeful couples, including to our children.

They had to digest this big disappointment several times. But much worse is the agony of uncertainty once the birth-mother has relinquished her baby and the adoptive parents take the child home.

For 28 days the mother can take her baby back without a problem. Until the adoption has been finalized through the courts, which can take up to a year, she can get her child back if she hires a lawyer and her circumstances meet the standards the court has set. The birth-mother usually wins.

Death-like severing

Can you imagine the pain the adoptive parents have to go through? They have bonded with the baby, taken care of it, loved it with all their hearts, and all of a sudden it is as if he or she has died. We breathed a sigh of relief when the adoption of our grandson was finalized after almost a year.

The law favors the birth-mother but is cruel to the adoptive parents. If a young woman wants to give up her baby, and has had extensive counselling to help her make that brave and selfless decision, she should not have more than a few weeks after the birth to change her mind. In cases when the mother-to-be is clearly not able to create a safe and loving environment for her child, the law should certainly be changed.

Irreparable damage

Some young mothers simply can't cope with the responsibility of caring for a child. Often these young women come from broken homes or have been abused. Their babies and young children may go back and forth from parent to foster home. By the time such children are four or five years old, many are hopelessly damaged. There are often willing parents who will still adopt these children, but at what price to the child?

Should the law not say that these children should be up for adoption shortly after birth? Many babies could be saved, and many more parents would see their quiet homes being transformed into homes filled with happy children's laughter.

Berta Hosmar
Whitby, Ont.

Christian Courier

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Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

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Produced by Zondervan Publishing House in association with Focus on the Family. For ages 6-12.

In Rome in A.D. 64 Nero attempts to annihilate Christianity. However, at secret meetings, Ben the Baker and his wife, Helena, as well as others, keep the stories of Jesus alive.

This courageous couple take in children who were separated from their parents after Rome burned. Justin, Cyrus, Anna and Marcus experience first-hand the consequences of loving Jesus in the first century. Roman soldiers capture Cyrus when he attempts to escape from them by relying on acrobatic tricks he learned from his family.

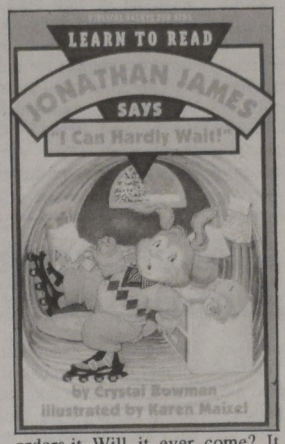
Flavian the merchant, watching Cyrus' mastery of acrobatics, bribes a Roman soldier and takes the child as his slave. But Cyrus is treated far better than could be expected of a man known for his cruelty to slaves. He is not imprisoned, but is pampered and is treated as Flavian's son. He becomes the star of the show as he entertains Flavian's guests.

When his family attempts to rescue him, Cyrus refuses to go back to them. But soon Flavian's mansion is burned to the ground in a slave revolt and Flavian disowns Cyrus. Cyrus returns home, afraid of his family's rejection. Why should they accept him after he spurned them in favor of riches and fame? Cold, hungry and dejected, Cyrus expects no welcome. But his brother comes out to greet him, wrapping him in an old cloak, far better than the rich cloak Flavian had bestowed on him earlier.

The story of Jesus' healing of the centurion's servant and the parable of the prodigal son are interspersed throughout this 30-minute video. Children will see that just as Jesus healed the centurion's servant, so he healed the rift between Cyrus and his family. And just as the prodigal son was welcomed home, so Cyrus received undeserved love.

Jonathan James Says,'I Can Hardly Wait!'

By Crystal Bowman. Illustrated by Karen Maizel. *Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997, 45 pp., $4.99 U.S.; $6.99 Cdn.*



Jonathan James is a lovable rabbit with an impatient heart. When Jonathan's father buys him new roller blades on sale in the winter, he has to wait till spring to use them. Winter stretches out interminably. But one day spring does arrive and Jonathan is finally able to roller blade outdoors.

When Jonathan sees a watch advertised on a cereal box, he longs to order it. But Mother says that first he must earn the money. He helps with household chores till he has acquired six dollars. But now he must still wait for it to arrive after he orders it. Will it ever come? It does! And Jonathan exalts in his new glow-in-the-dark acquisition.

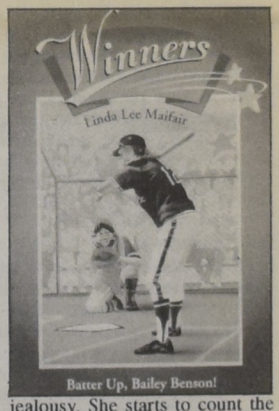
Perhaps the hardest thing for Jonathan to wait for is Thanksgiving Day because then Grandpa will visit. Each day he asks Mother, "Is it Thankgiving yet?" He tries to make the day arrive more quickly by praying thankfully to God and by drawing a picture of a turkey. But only as time passes does Thanksgiving arrive. And with it, Jonathan's loving grandpa!

In these three short chapters of a "learn to read" book, children will realize that good things and events are worth waiting for. They will discover in Jonathan James a character they can identify with and love.

Karen Maizel's bright illustrations effectively convey Jonathan's impatience, sadness, contentment and joy.

Batter Up, Bailey Benson!

By Linda Lee Maifair. *Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997, 56 pp., $3.99 U.S.; $5.99 Cdn.*



Batter Up, Bailey Benson!

Fifth-graders Bailey and Nikki love baseball. And they've always played it together. But when they try out for the Adams County Junior Softball League, something unexpected happens. Nikki is accepted as a pitcher by the Orioles and Bailey is accepted as a catcher by the White Sox. The best friends will be competing against each other! Nikki vows that they'll always be teammates, whether they're on the same team or not. But Bailey worries about the times they will compete against each other.

When the Orioles watch the White Sox practising, they laugh at the Sox's mistakes. And to her horror and anger, Bailey notices that Nikki is laughing at her.

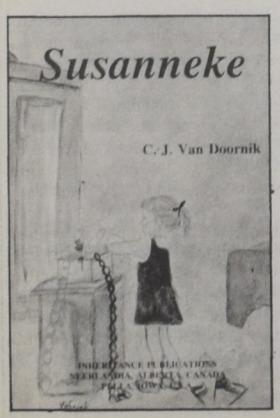
Blake, Bailey's older brother, attempts to calm her anger and encourages her to be forgiving. After all, he says, "Even in softball a person gets three strikes before she's out." Bailey accepts his advice and invites Nikki to a family outing. But Nikki, uninterested in Bailey's invitation, already has plans to be with her baseball team. Bailey makes other attempts to contact Nikki, but each time Nikki is already busy with her new team.

Bailey starts to count the strikes against Nikki and soon judges that Nikki has struck out with her. She avoids her former best friend at school and is rude to her as their teams compete. But a nagging ache persists in her stomach and Bailey is confronted by the ugliness of her jealousy. She starts to count the strikes against herself and realizes there is only one thing left for her to do. She phones Nikki but meets with rejection.

Bailey prays that God will show her a way to be reconciled to Nikki. When she finally has a chance to ask for forgiveness, she presents Nikki with the baseball she'd once received from her with these words written on it: "To B.B. Best friends always. N.W." And the girls renew their friendship.

Young baseball enthusiasts will enjoy this story of competition on the field and off of it. Any child who has struggled with jealousy towards a friend will be able to identify with Bailey's struggle and feel the joy of a restored relationship.

Susanneke



By C.J. Van Doornik. *Neerlandia, Alta.: Inheritance Publications, 1994, 34 pp.*

Susanneke, the caretaker's daughter, lives in the house connected to the church. On the day before Christmas she wanders into the church. To her disappointment, she notices it isn't decorated for Jesus' birthday.

She decides to beautify the church in order to please Jesus. Using streamers, flags and lanterns, she makes the church as festive as possible, anticipating the joyful, surprised reactions of her father and the church members.

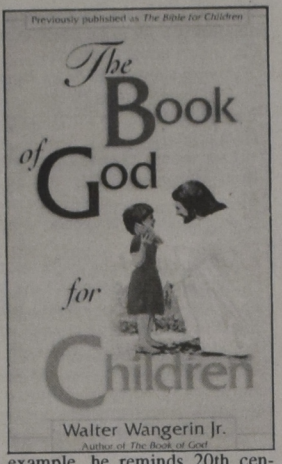
On Christmas morning, people don't respond to her efforts as she expected. Her father tears down the decorations. When he chides her for being disobedient, Susanneke becomes angry. Her grandmother comforts her, explaining that it is wrong to decorate the church because it can lead to fighting between those members who appreciate it and those who don't. Susanneke accepts her grandmother's explanation of the church's struggle and is instantly joyful.

This story, originally published in Dutch, is disappointing because it is moralistic and didactic. The author's message is imposed on the story in the form of the grandmother's final speech. Also, the story's resolution is dissatisfying because it is unrealistic.

very young Christians

The Book of God for Children

By Walter Wangerin Jr.
Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997, 416 pp., $14.99 U.S.; $20.99 Cdn.



In his introduction, Wangerin invites children to listen to the awesome story of God's work in the world. Why? Because, he says, "It's the story of how God loved you. It's God's story. It's Jesus' story. And it is your story." Wangerin not only invites children to listen to it, but to love it and to love God.

Wangerin, a Lutheran theologian, pastor and writer, wisely escapes the tendency of previous Bible story writers for children who feel compelled to reduce each story to a moral or object lesson. Always, Wangerin paints each individual story on the larger canvas of God's redemptive work in history.

As Wangerin retells the biblical stories he brings to life setting, character and plot. For example, he reminds 20th century children, who usually live in houses and not in tents, that tent walls are thin. No wonder Rebekah heard Esau's threat to kill Jacob after he lost Isaac's blessing, and thus was able to send Jacob away to safety!

Several themes emerge as Wangerin tells of Abraham, Isaac, Moses, David, Peter, Paul and a multitude of other characters. As God revealed himself to all these people, they learned to trust him. They discovered how to walk in his strength. They understood that to obey God is to find life.

And yet, though they embraced him, they also rebuffed him. Though they obeyed him, they also dishonored him. But God, jealous in his love for his people, constantly called them back to a life of obedience.

Each child who hears these stories will also hear God's love echoing through the ages, till now, till the 20th century when families still gather around supper tables and at bedtime to listen to "the old, old story."

The only disappointing aspect of the book is that many of the Scripture quotations are not from a modern version of the Bible.

I See The Moon

By Kathi Appelt.
Illustrated by Debra Reid Jenkins.
Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997, 24 pp., $15 U.S., $21 Cdn.

Kathi Appelt has written a poetic text, based on old nursery rhymes, that will assure and comfort any child who has experienced fear at night. She marvellously and simply develops the theme of Psalm 139:9-10 for the understanding of young children: "If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me."

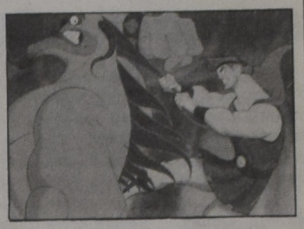
A little girl dreams that she is alone at sea and wonders if anyone knows that she's there. As she encounters, one by one, the moon, stars, wind, sun and a dove, she ponders who sent each to her aid. When she finally reaches shore, she asks, "Who was as close as my very next breath?" Sitting on the sand, she understands that God will be with her wherever she goes.

Debra Reid Jenkins' rich illustrations are a visual feast, full of color and motion. The child's expressive face captures wonder, fear and joy, and finally, peace. This book would make an excellent gift for a child's baptism or early birthdays. I have also used it for family devotions.

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema is a short story writer and the mother of five children who lives in St. Catharines, Ont.

Film review

Disney's *Hercules* is strong as a real Greek god — and funnier



Marian Van Til

Hercules

Rated Family. Animated feature by Walt Disney Productions. Includes the voices of Charlton Heston, James Woods, Rip Torn, Danny DeVito, Paul Shaffer. Music by Alan Menken. Directed by John Musker and Ron Clements.

After sitting through Disney's historically skewed *Pocohantas* and cringing at the simplistic, happy-ending- treatment it gave to Victor Hugo's poignant, tragic *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, one could be forgiven for thinking twice about bringing children to see further Disney animated versions of classic stories or historical figures. Thus, *Hercules* is a very pleasant surprise.

With pizzazz and plenty of humor, *Hercules* introduces youngsters to a handful of Greek mythical figures they may have heard of, but had no understanding of. The humor is pervasive and ranges from clever sight gags to astute dialogue and subtle puns (aimed at keeping the adults in the crowd interested).

From the start, *Hercules* pokes fun at itself and the reputation that Greek and Roman myth has had among generations of North American school kids for being complicated and boring. A weighty narration by none other than Charlton ("Moses") Heston begins the tale. An "ancient" vase is set before us bearing the image of Hercules and the five Muses. Suddenly the Muses come to life, reincarnated as a Greek chorus of black gospel singers who tell Heston to lighten up, proceed to grab up the narration, rhyme it and set it to a funky gospel beat. The Muses return every now and then when comment on the story is called for.

Regaining immortality

At Hercules' birth his proud parents, the god Zeus and goddess Hera, celebrate. But baby Hercules is kidnapped, brought to earth and left with only a spark of immortality by the forces of Hades. Hades isn't a place but a person, the god who ruled the underworld (the place we've come to associate with hell). Hades, a kind of underworld con man, is given a voice of energetic malevolence by actor James Woods.

A kind human couple raise the awkward boy-god, Hercules, who is still impossibly strong by human standards. Then a satyr named Philoctetes ("Phil" to us) takes Hercules under his, uh, hooves in an attempt to train him to be a hero. And of course, eventually, it works. (The satyrs were merry-making, if not lecherous, woodland gods who were companions of Bacchus.) Phil's voice is provided by Danny DeVito in his best wise-guy style.

It was with Disney's *Aladdin*, I recall, that the film animators began to make a story's characters take on the physical characteristics of the actors who provided their voices (thus the genie in the bottle had a face that no one would miss as resembling Robin Williams). That effective and often humorous practice is continued here. For example, Hades has the angular look of James Woods, exaggerated into deathly gauntness; satyr Phil has a chubby, DeVito-like body with skinny goat-legs and hooves sticking out humorously below — and on the other end, a balding head between his horns.

Hercules inadvertantly falls in love with a minions of Hades, Megara ("Meg"), and could be in big trouble. But needless to say, the story has a happy ending (this *is* Disney). And it, and we, also have fun getting there. Those singing, frolicking Muses, the infectious music by Alan Menken, the literate, witty dialogue and the frequent, clever animated metamorphoses from one scene into another all contribute to the enjoyment.

If you take young children to see *Hercules*, you won't be bored yourself while your kids are having a good time.

Church

Book is life-blood for Soviet evangelicals

AKRON, Pa. (MCC) — On his last visit to Russia, Walter Sawatsky was surprised to find he had achieved celebrity status in Christian circles — for a book he had written in 1981.

Sawatsky serves as Mennonite Central Committee's (MCC) consultant on East-West relations and is a professor at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind.

Sixteen years ago, Herald Press of Scottdale, Pa., published his *Soviet Evangelicals since World War II*. The book finally appeared in Russian translation in January 1996.

When Sawatsky visited Russia and Ukraine last December, he discovered he had become a luminary among evangelicals there. At the Donetsk (Ukraine) Christian University, instructor Nellie Klimenko introduced him to a group of 80 students as "the author everyone is reading."

Author denied visa

The book, which provides a thorough historical overview of the evangelical movement in the Soviet Union from World War II through the late 1970s, is a 559-page bound white softcover in Russian. It is selling in several Christian bookstores now emerging in Russia and Ukraine for the equivalent of $4.50 Cdn. MCC Russia has donated copies to major evangelical theological schools in St. Petersburg, Odessa, Donetsk and Moscow.

Soviet authorities regularly denied Sawatsky a visa for seven years — from the book's English debut in 1981 through 1988 — because of his documentation of state interference in church life.

Some felt the book had been too critical of the registered Baptist Union, the Soviet-sanctioned Protestant organization. Alexei M. Bychkov was general secretary when Sawatsky's English text was published. He had read the galley proofs during a night in 1980. Over the years, Bychkov "apologized for not being able to reverse the government action to deny me a visa," Sawatsky relates.

When the two men met last December, Bychkov — now a seminary director and professor in Moscow — related that he found the book so helpful that he had taken the trouble, before the Russian version appeared, to translate sections of it for his students.

"One might have expected the general secretary of the registered Baptist Union to be unhappy with a book that exposed the way his fellow leaders worked under Soviet constraints," Sawatsky says.

As a Donetsk Christian College staff member drove him to the airport, Sawatsky conversed with another passenger, a young man completing his second year of alternative to military service — as truck driver at the city hospital. To survive, he was eating his meals at the college. When he learned Sawatsky had written *Soviet Evangelicals*, he pulled out his copy and asked for an autograph.

More recently, this past March, Sawatsky received an unexpected phone call from Sacramento, Calif. It was Yury Kriuchkov, brother of Gennady Kriuchkov. Gennady, president of the Reform Baptists Union, had led that movement while remaining in hiding from 1970 to 1992. Yury had immigrated to the United States in 1993. He had stumbled upon Sawatsky's book in a Russian language bookshop in Sacramento.

Truth matters

During the hour-long call, as Yury told stories of his own suffering for his faith, he repeatedly expressed appreciation for the book. With its availability in Russian, it enabled him and others like him to relive and rethink what had happened. The book's objective approach made discussion possible, even though Sawatsky had not always had the full picture while writing it.

"After so many decades of distorting the truth and suppressing the facts," Sawatsky says, "it now matters a great deal that the truth gets told, and it also matters how that is done."

Russian teacher paid heavy price for her faith

AKRON, Pa. (MCC) — The Russian translation of Walter Sawatsky's *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II* has provided an opening for some people to talk about their experiences as Christians under Soviet rule.

A very short 1979 letter from Ekaterina Alekseevna Morozova was included in the book. It said simply, "I am a teacher and a Baptist, and immediately after I was baptized I was dismissed from school."

Last month, Sawatsky received a letter dated May 25, 1997, from Morozova. After reading the Russian translation of *Soviet Evangelicals* and seeing her name in print, Morozova wanted to update what had happened to her. She listed the following events:

* After having been baptized and dismissed as a teacher as an "anticommunist element," the local court in 1948 took away her only son, then 7, to prevent her from raising him as a Christian. She was permitted no contact with him for 10 years.
* In 1951, Morozova was held in a Moscow psychiatric hospital for four months of tests, then "diagnosed" with schizophrenia. As a result, she was forced to take injections at a psychiatric hospital, as an outpatient, for the next 40 years.
* On July 3, 1991, Morozova was told to appear at Psychiatric Dispensary No. 19, where she met with a group of psychiatrists in the director's office. The group's chairperson said, "Ekaterina Alekseevna, the commission has rehabilitated you."

"So I have been cured of schizophrenia?" she asked.

"No," he replied, "you never had schizophrenia. Faith in God does not constitute a psychiatric illness. We have checked your medical history for the 40 years and could not find any other reason for diagnosing schizophrenia."

She concluded her letter to Sawatsky: "I thank God for your wonderful book. It is greatly needed by the Russian people. May God bless you."

So you want to improve your church education program?

Jessie Schut

Take some free advice pooled from a gathering of CRC church education consultants (CECs).

A good education program, they say, has four components: an involved education committee gives leadership; a superintendent who supports the teachers; good materials; committed teachers who have been trained to use those materials.

The education committee:

It oversees the education program and is very important, says Willy Van Schepen, a CEC from Bellflower, Calif., and the superintendent of Sunday School in her home church. "Every month, someone from the education committee calls me and asks if I have any specific needs," she says. "And the chairperson of the committee sits down with me at the beginning of the season and helps me plan my year." Education committees can set goals, help with recruitment, organize an Education Sunday, and facilitate programs.

The superintendent:

These multi-talented people have a miriad of roles. Among other things, they recruit staff, encourage and support teachers, organize classes, order supplies and materials, lead teachers' meetings ... and do whatever needs doing. They're worth their weight in gold and deserve lots of support and praise.

The materials:

Naturally, CECs think CRC Publications materials are the best!

That's borne out by the fact that at least 20 other denominations use the material. All curriculum brings with it an interpretation of Scripture, and churches need to make sure that the point of view put forth in the curriculum agrees with the church's beliefs.

Trained teachers:

The teacher's first qualification is a love for the Lord, and a desire to tell others about him. Training helps teachers to do that most effectively. When Willy Van Schepen sat down and counted, she realized that the children at her church were only in class for 28 hours each year. "If you're only spending that much time with the children, you need to make the most of it," she says. "Training inspires teachers to use their gifts to the best of their ability."

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CRC government contact committee highlights concerns re: same-sex rights

CC Staff

BURLINGTON, Ont. — The Council of Christian Reformed Churches in Canada's Committee for Contact with Government (CCG) has produced a short paper which responds to 11 "questions and concerns expressed by CRC members regarding a Christian contribution to the discussion about legislation affecting homosexuals."

This response is part of CCG's "attempt to promote dialogue and input into the substantive areas of this discussion."

The CCG says that the CRC's "1973 synodical position does not address the government's role, nor the relationships between the church's moral position [against homosexual sexual activity] and public policy."

Bone of contention

Many church members believe the government should promote the morality that Christians affirm as God-glorifying. Others question the justice of that perspective in a multi-faith society.

In the "questions and concerns," CCG indicates that it has attempted to work within the concept of "appropriate spheres of responsibility for different agents in society." But its acknowledges that "the degree to which governmental judgment of such [homosexual] sexual activity is within the government's 'sphere' seems to be a bone of contention for Christian Reformed people in Canada."

The "questions and concerns" have been published in the latest (and last) *Agenda of [the] Council of Christian Reformed Churches in Canada* (the CCRCC will disband within the next two years). Copies are available from CRC headquarters in Burlington, Ont., and have also been sent to every CRC church council in Canada.

The 'questions and concerns'

The following is an excerpt from CCG's response to church members' "questions and concerns" about homosexuality described at left.

Concern: CCG material that acknowledges and tries to respond to the social phenomenon of homosexual relationships amounts, in effect, to a condoning of those relationships.

Response: No one can deny that the social phenomenon of same-sex partnerships occurs in Canadian society without legal prohibitions. And few Christians are calling for the renewed criminalization of homosexual acts, even when we believe it to be a sin. To acknowledge that these relationships exist is a far step from condoning them. To note further that these partnerships are completely unregulated — as relationships without legislation that addresses the particular issues faced by these couples — is, again, simply descriptive.

Concern: If the church is seen to accede to any of the needs of same-sex couples, (even something as basic as hospital visiting rights), that will be used to push things beyond where we would ever want to go. By staying unequivocal in our response we may temper the range of changes that ultimately come about.

Response: When Christians unequivocally opposed legislation prohibiting abortions past the 13th week of pregnancy because of concern for those youngest of unborn children, the practical result was *no* law protecting *any* unborn.... By supporting a separate designation distinguishing [same-sex] couples from married couples, churches may make a practical step in avoiding the complete revision of society's mariage concept, while still providing an avenue for responding to justice issues that do not threaten a Christian concept of family.

An exploration

Under the heading "Knowing God's Will for Public Life", CCG states that "God has given each institution in society its own area of responsibility, authority and freedom." But the degree to which judgment of homosexual activity is "within the government's 'sphere' seems to be a bone of contention for Christian Reformed people in Canada," says CCG.

CCG has said that assessing the morality and normativity of sexual behavior is the church's, not the government's task.

At the end of the document, CCG asks its constituency, "Can we agree that government's role is limited to public justice in contrast to private issues?"

Canada's largest seminary takes theology to the people

NORTH YORK, Ont. (OTS) — Ontario Theological Seminary, an evangelical, transdenominational, fully accredited graduate school of theology, will offer satellite classes in Ottawa, London and Oakville beginning in September.

The school is committed to taking theology to the people rather than expecting all students to move to the Toronto area and to give up their employment in order to pursue studies.

From its inception 20 years ago, it has offered Monday classes for working pastors, evening school for people in the Greater Toronto Area who have been unable to afford the luxury of full-time study, and one and two-week intensive courses during the winter, spring and summer for the benefit of other busy people, particularly for those from various parts of Ontario and the rest of Canada.

Responding to the request of the leadership of local churches, the Extension Ministries department is launching out to reach an even wider audience. For the benefit of those who cannot come to Toronto, courses will now be offered in other centres, which may expand to additional cities within the next few years.

The first course to be offered in September will be "New Testament Theology and History," to be taught by Edith Humphrey (Ottawa), Nancy Calvert-Koyzis (London) and Roy Matheson (Oakville). Each professor is a doctoral graduate who is highly respected for both scholarly ability and teaching skills, a combination that OTS regards as essential in its faculty.

Being contemporary

This New Testament course, to be followed in January by a similar introduction to the world of the Old Testament, is intended to be foundational for serious biblical study and can be taken for credit toward a Master of Theological Studies or Master of Divinity degree, or it may be taken on a non-credit basis.

"Our desire is to make theological education accessible to all who recognize the need to be better grounded in the Christian faith," says W. Ward Gasque, academic dean of OTS. "People spend years and thousands of dollars seeking to equip themselves for their secular vocation. Our Extension Ministries program offers to assist them in their desire to equip themselves for Christian discipleship and ministry."

OTS strives to educate both clergy and laity as equal partners in ministry. Its student body is made up of 650 men and women from nearly every Canadian Christian denomination.

This new program represents the school's attempt to respond to the contemporary educational needs of the church rather than "to perpetuate forms of theological education that are wedded to bygone eras," says OTS.

Bible societies fund new floating clinic

TORONTO (Can. Bible Society) — Bible Societies in Brazil, Canada and the Netherlands have joined together to raise $910,000 to fund a new hospital boat, *Light of the Amazon III*. The Canadian Bible Society has pledged $275,000 towards this project.

Life for people in the Amazon region of Brazil is extremely hard, with malnutrition and illness running rampant. Most of the people live along the river bank, miles apart from each other; illness means travelling far for medical aid.

The *Amazon III* will mean more accessibility and, subsequently, faster medical assistance for the people of this region. The boat will be equipped with examining rooms, a laboratory and necessary medical supplies. Staffed by volunteer doctors, nurses, dentists, technicians and evangelists, it will tend to people's physical as well as spiritual needs.

For body and spirit

Currently, the Brazilian Bible Society operates *Light of the Amazon II*, a boat similar to the *Amazon III* but older and slower. It, too, is equipped with an infirmary, medicine inventory room, laboratory and a dentist's room. *Light of the Amazon II* is the only boat with such features operating in the vast Amazon region. During each trip the boat leaves the city of Belem and travels specific, predetermined routes on the Amazon, stopping at small villages along the river bank, where it offers free medical, social and spiritual assistance to the local population.

Every person who leaves the *Amazon II* is given a package containing any necessary medication, as well as other personal hygiene supplies and the Scriptures. With the addition of the *Amazon III*, larger areas of this immense region will be served.

Now with both boats travelling the Amazon River, dispensing food, clothing, medical supplies and Scriptures, more and more people will receive the help they so urgently need.

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Short Story

First Bride

James Calvin Schaap

By Dutch standards, the house is not old — at best, at very best, one hundred years. Fortress-like, red brick, hip-roofed in long, thick thatch, it stands 200 metres back from a country lane meandering up and out from the Veluwe, a woody area of the Netherlands we might call a national forest. The area is very provincial; most Dutch people would call it backward. I once met a man from Ermelo who told me people consider the whole region twenty years behind the times; he jerked the visor of his cap, hurrumphed a bit, and told me he wished it were 25.

Nothing about the house distinguishes it. Surrounded by a few trees and a wooden fence covered with something like chicken wire, the place is quintessentially Dutch, from its steep roofs to the small barn that is not out back of the house but is the house's own spacious back room. A few trees line its brick lane, and unused wooden lawn furniture sits in a square patch of yard created where the front wall of what used to be the barn suddenly juts out from the line of the house and looks over that corner with the eye of a new and broad picture window.

On that trip to the Netherlands, my third, I took a small tape recorder, and as I travelled I told it things I didn't want to forget. Not until I stopped the car behind the house did I remember that although that recorder was in my hand and running, I'd been saying nothing.

Exactly what I wanted to tell this woman I didn't know. I didn't resent her; I had no reason to, never having met her, never having even known of her until the day before I pulled up at her back door. If I hadn't stumbled on her name beside my father's on his emigration records, I would have never known she existed. The thought of simply turning around never crossed my mind. Nervous, yes — but as I remember that moment, I was not reluctant, perhaps because I wondered whether the two of us had known completely different men. I wanted her to acquaint me with the father I'd never met.

It was late spring, and the sun had appeared for what seemed to have been the first time since I'd come to the Netherlands four days before. Out back, in the grass north of the house, sheets and pillow cases lay spread over the ground. Even though I'd never seen that done before, I knew — how? by DNA? — that the bedding was being whitened in the old way, bleached by the sun. It was not a kind of *deja vu* — I felt no flashing echoes. But the thought of my father, years before, standing there himself, out back of this house, at the same exact place, at a time in his life when he was head-over-heels in love, was overwhelming. The war was over. A young woman who lived there would be his bride. I wondered how often he stood right there kissing her passionately. How often, just a few minutes later, did he walk down the lane from this back door, dreaming of the full course of this woman's love, a woman not my mother?

He never once spoke of a first marriage, never hinted at this huge story in his life. Nothing in his demeanor or his frequent sermons to me had ever suggested he'd suffered — the war, yes; I'd heard dozens of stories about the war. But nothing about his first bride. I had no idea there'd been anyone other than my mother. I would never have dared guess, really — and I'm a historian. My father is not secretive or reclusive; with no hesitation, I'd describe him as joyful and jovial. Even on the most forsakenly frigid Alberta mornings, with the wind tugging at our barn's every shingle and slat, the milking parlor could be as warm as the house, filled as it was with cows, gospel music from the Motorola, and my father's lilting tenor. He was not secretive, not brooding, not dark or silenced. I would have never guessed he could hold the secret of a marriage so firmly.

But there had been a first wife. Why didn't he tell me? Was it out of some deference to my mother? Or was the whole story that painful — even half a century after it ended? What had he done? Was it my father's sin, or was it simply my father's pain? Either way, how and why could he cover it so completely?

I make my living on the past. I trade on details. I unearth secrets wherever and whenever I can, trying to make sense of time and place long past. History is my method of putting together a puzzle from pieces scattered hither and yon in a quantity never quite sufficient to complete the whole. But the truth is that I felt somewhat sordid as I stood there behind that Dutch house digging through my father's past. Back home, he was dying of cancer, and here I was scooping a story for some trashy family tabloid my brothers and sisters would likely be the only ones to read. Who else would care? No one. What difference did it make that he'd married before my mother? But I am a historian. Berendina Janssens, a woman I'd never met, was his first wife. I had to know.

I was in the Netherlands for a conference on Dutch-Canadian immigration, where I had been riffling through data on display — someone's research project newly computerized — when I punched in my father's name simply to see how the program worked. From the time I was a child I knew the month and year he'd left Holland, where he'd come from, and where and when he'd arrived in Canada. As a boy, I visited the Ontario farm where he worked his first six months. Ten years ago, I met the old man who'd sponsored him, a man who, like my father, had never said a word about a first marriage, even though we'd talked for an hour or more. Had there been conspiracy? And did my mother know? Maybe she didn't. Maybe that's why my father never spoke of Berendina Janssens.

During a break between conference sessions, on a whim I typed in my father's name on that computer; the CD-ROM light glowed, and the screen kicked out the whole bill of goods: the date he'd left, the name of the ship that had carried him to Canada, and the name — Berendina Janssens-Versteeg. My first impulse was to hide the screen from people milling around me. I stooped over the screen as if I'd forgotten my glasses and read the name again and again.

I had only a day to find out something about this woman, so I left the conference that afternoon and drove out to the Veluwe.

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The house has a front door, but I don't remember it. All the comings and goings happen by way of the back, where the driveway leads. Behind the house — behind what once was the barn — stands a real barn, small by North American standards, but obviously still something of a dairy. Spread out back of the place were a few acres of fenced pasture with Holstein-Friesians, a picture that could have passed for a New Brunswick tourist poster. It was a bright, clear Saturday morning, not warm but beautiful, the air, like so much

of rural Holland, redolent with manure.

The door was barely bigger than a closet door and painted in no distinguishing way. There was a doorbell. I pushed it, quickly, as I remember. The time that had passed since I'd come up the drive couldn't have been long but I already felt like a trespasser. A woman stood in shrouded darkness before me almost immediately — small, far too small for my father, who always stooped in the basement of our farm home.

At that moment, I believe I had to fight not to show my nervousness. I deliberately used English. "Berendina Janssens," I said, "is that right?"

She nodded. She seemed younger than my father, significantly younger, a wisp of a woman. That's what I thought. "My name is Gerald Versteeg," I said. "I'm from Canada. I was at this conference in Utrecht —"

"You may come in," she said, unlatched the door and stepped aside, looking away with a deference not uncharacteristic of older Dutch women.

Something between them had broken, humpty-dumptied forever. He left her — or she him. I was born in '49, and I am, very much, by physical resemblance, my mother's child. That left only two years for my father to start all over again after whatever it was that broke up the brand new marriage he'd come to Canada with. Maybe she was the real reason he'd left Ontario for Alberta.

"My brother warned me you were coming," she said, her English hardly broken. "He called."

I should have said that my even being there was something of a miracle. I'd met her brother at the Vrijgemaakte church in Heerde, the place to which I'd been directed by a woman at the travellers' centre. She'd said there were many Janssens still in town, but two of them of my father's generation would be at her church, working. I lied to that woman; in my halting Dutch I told her I was looking for my mother's family, assuming like the small-towner I am that, even fifty years later and the Nazis long gone, the real story might still be a scandal.

Berendina Janssens' brother was one of a dozen retirees dressed in traditional garb and standing around a little museum and store just behind the church, a place run for the cause of missions in Zaire. I couldn't lie to this man, and once he had squared away who I was, he told me the most astounding news — that this woman who'd been married to my father had, years ago, returned to the Netherlands alone and now lived here, just outside of town, in the family house. Not for a moment did he hesitate. "You must, of course, see her," he told me, reaching for a pencil from the pocket of his collarless shirt. "It is not a far distance from here, and she is at home." He must have called her just after I left.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DOUG ROORDA

"I'm sorry for walking in on you like this — I mean, out of nowhere," I told her as she closed the outside door behind us.

"Don't be," she said. "So many years ago it was that I hardly remember your father so good."

It was dark in the old barn. I couldn't make out her face clearly, but she pointed me toward the back door of the home. I'd heard enough stories about attached barns to fill the place with incidents from the war — men hiding from the Nazis, at least a dozen earthy stories about people relieving themselves back there and getting caught off guard.

"My Dutch isn't as good as it should be," I told her as we walked over the freshly swept cement. "I'm glad you speak English well."

"I lived for ten years in Canada," she said. "But I knew English already before I left — before we did."

"*We*," I said, "meaning my father?"

"Of course," she said. I followed her silhouette through the semi-darkness, the only light coming through that picture window on the far end of the room. She wasn't at all what I had imagined — heavy and square-built, no *dikke vrouw*. She wasn't thick-shouldered, wasn't dressed in a smock. She wore slacks, and she wore them so well that my father's interest in her, fifty years ago, was obvious — she would have been a looker.

"So," she said as we came into the kitchen, "who are you?"

"I thought you knew," I told her. "You said your brother called —"

"I mean, who are you?" Typical Dutch aggression. She didn't turn as she spoke, simply marched me into the kitchen, pulled a chair out from the table for me, then walked to the counter for coffee. "What kind of son might I have had if I stayed with your father?"

"I can't get over your English," I told her. "Do you use it often?"

"In Holland many people speak English — but not of my generation," she said. Two black cups, thick porcelain, she swiped from a tree of cups at the far end of the table, set them down before us and filled them. "We're not fascists, like the French," she said. "And there is that, of course —" she pointed at the television at the far end of the table.

Berendina Janssens's hair was stylishly short, parted at the side, and cut straight, a wave in her bangs. The lines around her mouth and eyes wouldn't allow falsehood about age, and her fingers, as she poured the coffee, seemed craggy and probably rheumatoid. But when she leaned back from the table and drew her hair away from her face, she made it difficult for me to think of her as an old woman. Something undefeated flashed in her eyes, something which a half century ago might well have made my father the hymn singer consider the deep reaches of his desire downright sinful.

She took a chair, sat back with her cup in her hand, twisted herself out from the table slightly, just far enough to cross her legs before her, holding her chin so high as to be defiant. "What do you do?" she said, and then tucked her left arm beneath the one with steaming coffee and looked straight into my eyes. "What brings you to Holland?"

"I'm a professor," I said.

She nodded, as if that passed muster.

"I teach history," I told her. "I teach Canadian history, actually."

She nodded again.

I honestly believe that inside me my father's own genes reached for her. She was that attractive. The way she addressed me was forthright, fully engaged, direct and alive. Those first five minutes she never moved from her chair, but her energy filled the room. Had she been my mother, my life would have been different — I knew it almost immediately.

"Historians," she said, smiling, "are keepers of the facts." She advanced her cup as if it were a weapon. "What *you* people know is the truth."

"Can anyone claim that, really?" I said.

She snuck a peak at my face and winked. "If you think that way, then you must have left your father's church behind," she said. "There, everyone knows all of the truth."

Quick mind. Engaged cynic. "You find my leaving the church a good thing?" I asked.

She shrugged her shoulders. "Are you happy?" she said.

Typically Dutch. Cut-to-the-chase questions.

"Is anyone?" I said.

"Some fortunate few, I think," she said. And then, "What must I call you, 'Professor Versteeg?'"

"Tony," I said.

Under her breath she repeated my name, and then, in Dutch, "Anton," she corrected. "We were saying, some people are happy — and you are one of them?"

"More than some," I said, "less than others."

"And smarter than some, too," she said, quickly. Another wink.

She wore a navy sweater, cotton, crew neck, very traditionally cut, no blouse peeking out at the collar. There were no rings on her hands, nothing to make clear whether or not she had married again. The way she looked at me — when she wasn't speaking, when she wasn't probing — was maternal at times, her eyes measuring in a way I would have found un-

Continued on page 12...

... continued from page 11

comfortable if she were not the woman who'd once married my father. She was doing research, I suppose, using her own methods.

"I am your first husband's son," I said. "What would you like to know?"

She adjusted her glasses with the back of her hand, then took a deep breath, the first sign I read of any reluctance at all. "What did your father tell you?"

At that moment, for a reason I don't know myself, I wanted to protect him. I didn't want her to know that she was a personal secret he'd either hoarded or hated or both. "What must I call you?" I asked.

"Dena," she said, a familiarity I wouldn't have expected.

"And your last name?"

"Janssens," she said, "my family name."

Maybe it was myself I wanted to protect, the historian who'd, ironically, known nothing about his own family record. "Was the marriage annulled?" I asked.

"What did he tell you?" she said again.

I brought the cup up to my lips and took a sip of the strong coffee, then lied.

"That it ended," I said.

"That's all?"

My imagination created a conversation in which my father told all. We're in our barn, the milking done, and we're standing alongside the stanchions. He would have told me with a moral imperative, in the same way he told me almost everything. I can see him pointing his finger. And then I told Mrs. Janssens, "He told me it didn't matter what happened. What he'd learned was that you have to pick up the pieces and go on." I hunched my shoulders quickly, as he might have. "'Bad things happen,' he said, 'but the point is not to let them ruin your life.'" And then I smiled my father's consecrated smile. "'Suffering can make you strong' — that's what he said. 'The thing is to grow from adversity.'" I was sounding like Robert Schuller.

At that point, I'm not sure she even heard what I'd said. She held up a hand, uncrossed her legs, put her cup on the table and pointed to the floor. "That's where he was, you know — that's where he stayed," she said. "For six months, the man lived with us — six months. I was seventeen and every able-bodied man around was off somewhere, hiding or gone."

"My father?" I said.

"I didn't even know your father then," she said. "Oh, maybe by family — maybe I could picture him — his walk, his thick hair, that high wave. I knew *of* him, you might say, but I didn't know him."

I had no idea who she was talking about, but I did understand that even though I had been in Dena Janssens house for no more than five minutes, she'd already cut to the very heart of a story I hadn't heard in all of my years with my father.

"He lived here with us for almost six months at the very end of the war, and I loved him," she told me, her clenched lips enforcing the passion she remembered. "My mother would have killed me — she was one of you people."

I suspected what she meant by that was something religious, but I let her speak.

"It was dangerous really, for my parents to let them talk with us — with the children." She pointed again, then kicked back the rug. "Look, look at your feet."

There beneath me was enough of square line to recognize that just below the kitchen table had been the hiding place, a cellar for whoever it was the Janssens family hid from the Nazis — *onderduikers*, maybe Jews.

"It was frightfully stupid," she said. "I didn't know that then, but I've thought of it often since that time. It was one thing," she told me, "for my parents to hide them here, but it was another altogether for them to let us mingle with them — and the younger children." She swept both hands up in gesture of silliness. "Who knows? One of my sisters may have picked up an English word or phrase and used it at church in front of someone who should not have known we were hiding Canadian pilots."

****

At that moment, I knew the story. She'd fallen in love with a Canadian. She'd been in love with a Canadian pilot — but then why didn't she emigrate herself — a war bride? She must have used my father as a means to immigrate, then left him.

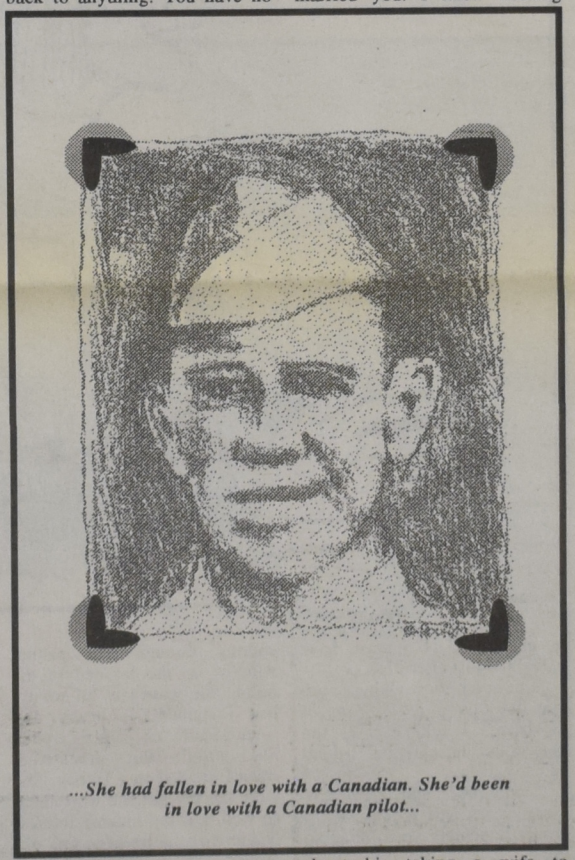
"My mother would have killed me if she knew. My father would have thrown me out of the house." She looked around her, at the stove and the laundry tree across the room, the tiles on the walls. "This house," she said, chuckling, "the one I live in now. He would have thrown me out, to be sure — a sinner because there was a baby — his baby. I needed your father."

As a pretext for getting to Canada, she'd married my father, used him as a means of finding the pilot her family had harbored and she'd loved. She must have been 16 maybe, very young; and in the middle of all that war mess, she'd fallen head over heels. This woman. She was pregnant.

"I'm like a rabbit, I suppose," she said. "Isn't it a rabbit that's supposed to move in circles — that's supposed to always return to its *hokken*? Now, here I am."

"A rabbit," I said, "yes. And me too, I suppose. Because here we sit — you and I."

"This is not your home," she said coldly. "You're not coming back to anything. You have no blood here."



...She had fallen in love with a Canadian. She'd been in love with a Canadian pilot...

I retaliated in kind. "How can you say that? My father's blood in on the back step," I told her. "I felt it when I stood there before coming in." She must have lied to him, told him he was the father — and it had to be fast, everything had to be fast. She had to have taken my father very, very quickly, then used his righteousness. "And his love is spilled here somewhere too, isn't it?" I said. "It haunts the place — it must be here —"

"Not his," she said. "My Canadian hero's is here," she said bitterly, "but not your father's." There was no pretence in her, no politics but truth, but sometimes it seems as if when she looked at me, she saw a lower species. "You love your father," she said. "And you should. But I didn't — never."

"I lied," I told her. "My father never told me one thing about — he never mentioned your existence — not once in his life. I never knew of a first bride."

Her eyes turned to steel, and the corners of her lips fell.

"Until yesterday, Mrs. Janssens, I didn't even know you exited," I told her. "I had absolutely no idea my father married you. I knew nothing about his taking a wife to Canada." Each line hit her hard, so I kept at it, assaulting her for reasons I really didn't know fully. "You can't imagine how surprised I was when I found your name with his," I told her. "My father married! He never spoke of you — not a word. Never mentioned you. Only by accident am I here — only by luck. You understand?

She reached for her cup, gathered what she could of her strength before lifting her eyes to mine once again. And then, some dignity coming back, she said, "So what do you expect me to believe," she said, "this first story or now the second one?"

I pulled the chair up close to the table. "Look at me," I said. "I'm telling you that not once in my father's life did he mention a word about you. I didn't know you existed until —" I looked at my watch, "until yesterday. Not even 24 hours ago."

She looked across the room, pulled her arms back from the table, sat straight on her chair, then lifted herself quickly and stepped back. "That's why I left him," she said. "Damned Christians and their stoic nonsense — if you don't talk about it, it doesn't exist." She raised her hands to her waist, stood there straight and proud. "Damn them — damn them all for their secret sins. Damn them all for their righteousness and their godliness. Isn't that like them? — like him. You can always tell the Christians because their backyards are full of dirt that's just spaded — so much they have to bury back there." What she said wasn't aimed at me. The anger spilled from something tipped full inside her. For a moment she seemed to have forgotten I was in the room, and then she looked up at me once again and something softened." And he is alive today yet — your father?"

"He's dying of cancer," I told her.

"That's nothing of my doing," she said.

"I didn't blame you," I told her. "I didn't come here to blame you for anything —"

"How many others like you — brothers and sisters?"

"Three — I'm the oldest."

"Alberta?" she asked.

"He left Ontario — he had relatives in Calgary." I didn't know the story exactly, but I played what I knew against her. "Probably soon after you left him," I said. Something of the defiance had drained from her face. "And you're back here in Holland?" I asked.

She circled the empty chair and then held both points of the back. "I got what I deserved," she said. "I got what I had coming. I don't think God is who the Christians think he is, but there is a God in heaven." She smiled. "I left your father," she raised her hands, rubbed a palm, "and my war lover left me — not even two years. Never married either. Not that I cared." Then she looked at me. "There's a God I suppose — I just don't like him."

"Maybe it's a woman," I said.

"He's not a woman," she said. "God has a man's heart, as I do."

"Why do you say that?"

"We could never get along — too much alike, me and *God*." Deliberately she rolled the *g* in the Dutch way. "Women who believe in Him *love* God," she told me. "Men who believe respect Him. I never loved Him."

"Not even then?" I asked.

"Before the war, maybe," she said, reaching for her cup. "Then I was a girl." She pulled it up into both hands but remained standing. "When I was a child, I thought as a child — you know what I mean?"

"And when you knew my father?" I asked.

"I was no child. After the war, there were no children left." She stopped quickly. "Well, maybe your father — I don't know. But none of the rest were children — "

"Nonsense," I said. I wanted to grab her — I really did. "You went winging off to Canada after some war hero? You lied with your body to my father for some pipe dream — to chase some guy in a uniform — and you say you weren't a child?"

She stood straight and tall behind the chair, the cup in both hands, and smiled, then laughed. "You're not like him," she said, "You're not like him at all, are you?"

"How do you know?" I said. "How long were you married? — a week?"

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Suddenly it hit her for the first time that I hadn't been lying to her, that the man she'd once married under pretext, the man she'd hauled on to some straw mattress somewhere in order to cover her sin, the man she had slept with, only to reach her baby's father in Canada — at that moment she understood that this man she didn't know at all had never even suggested her existence to me. She looked at me and said, "You don't know, do you?"

"I honestly don't know," I told her. "I don't know a word of the story. You're a revelation. Before yesterday, I had absolutely no idea there ever was a Berendina Janssens-Versteeg — no idea."

In little more than ten minutes, I'd seen iron resolve, an arrogance that angered me, and now something close to defeat — all of it so clearly written on her face that she never had to speak at all. I've seen that before in Dutch people — eyes that mirror every splintered emotion from the soul — concrete conviction to abject helplessness. What's going on inside appears so openly on their faces that I wonder what immigrant experience altered that in so many of the Dutch who left this country. Dena Janssens never ever would have buried the secret my father did. Why?

And then, just as quickly, those eyes softened once more. She pressed her lips together, then smiled, softly. "You could have been my son," she said. Gentle smile — even adoring. "Maybe I would have liked your mother."

"No," I said. "Not really."

"Why so?"

"The older I've become," I told her, "the more I believe this marriage was not what he wanted us to believe it was. He is a good, good man, but he is capable of falsehood, for righteousness' sake."

"I believe that," she said.

"He was happy in the barn — a different man in the house," I told her.

"What is she like?"

"She's gone. She died five years ago. He's alone." I pushed back the chair from the table, and just for a moment I looked down at that hiding place beneath me. "My mother," I said, "is as difficult to describe, as she was hard to love." I wasn't tailoring my words. "No one would deny that. But he never complained — I never heard about you, nor about her — never."

Determined smile, sympathetic, even stoic. "It is an act of faith," she said, "to withstand pain — and acts of faith count with the Lord." She bowed her head for a moment, seemed almost sad. "Bloody Christians all swear by election but work their heads off chasing righteousness for a reward they think they're winning all the same."

But she didn't know my father. He is not arrogant, not boastful; he is not puffed up. He may have faults, but he has never chased righteousness for any reason other than personal happiness and service to God — what he would call, simply, "thanks."

"So, you —" she said, and sat down once again beside me, "where do you fit in all of this?" She pulled the chair up close, leaned both her arms over the table towards me. "If you're not your mother's child and you're not your father's boy, then where did you come from — you historian? —"

Every word was measured and cut sharply to fit a pattern of gaining truth. I will admit it now. In a way, in those few moments in that old house, I loved her for her deliberateness, the way she cut to the quick, so much unlike my father, who away like my father. "Where did you come from?" she'd asked me. And I answered her in her own way — unflinching, direct. "Where did you?" I said. "Where do any of us come from?"

"From the air we breathe,"

...InCanada, I simply disappeared

seemed to me then to be living — and dying — in a completely different world. She had told me that she was too much like God to love him, and in a way I believed her. Not for a moment did she fritter away the words she could have chosen. I watched her moods shift like wind in the moods in her eyes. Everything was on the top, at the surface — nothing hidden she said. "All this genetics is just so much wasted science," she said. "I am a child of the war, the third child, second daughter, of Hendrick and Berendina Janssens. I was raised in their home — this one. But the war made me what I am." She sat back once again. "You would not believe what this place was like back then." Her arms spread instinctively. "It was a railroad station in here — people coming and going. Resistance people. Three Jews in the barn," she pointed to the back, "three pilots in the *mooie* room." Behind me, a closed door. "*Onderduikers* in and out and in and out." Her hands twisted and whirled and jigged. "And my parents — they were like your father, so naive. I sometimes think my father heartily believed that some great dome of grace protected this house." She looked at me directly, silent. "I hated him for that, really — for his innocence. It is a curse to be born of innocent, Christian parents — a curse. And all that time, me and my Canadian were making love —"

"Where?" I said. "With everybody in this house, where did you find a place?"

She laughed. "The great tragedy," she said, "is that we die — and before that grow old." She was back in this house, fifty years before. "For everything that happened — for what I did to your father and what that big-time hero did to me, for all of my parents' innocence, and the craziness" she laughed to herself, "— and the craziness of all of those people and outside the Nazis capable of killing us all." She shook her head. "With everything that happened to me since — my children, who knows where, and your father and being forced to come back here, to Holland — for those months at the end of the war, I'd probably do it all again." She raised a hand toward me. "You'll never understand that, but you asked, 'Where did you make love?' And my answer, Professor Versteeg, is where didn't we?"

"It was war — people were killed, millions," I said.

"And you," she said. "Did you ever know love? — you and your wife?"

"I'm divorced," I told her.

"I don't care," she said. "What I asked you was did you ever know love?"

"As a child?"

"Have you ever known love?" she said, slowly, as if pronouncing the words to an idiot.

"I don't know," I said.

"Then you haven't." Her fingers peaked as she held her hands up in front of her face. "For six months of my life, I had all I could do to breathe it in — in the middle of all of that bombing and Nazis all over, I was in love."

"Seventy-some years," I said. "And that's all it was — six months?"

Continued on page 14...

...continued from page 13

She raised her finger, pointed. "I was born in 1929, more than a decade before Hitler came to the Netherlands, but I am a child of the war."

"My father?" I said.

"You know him."

"Not like you did."

She nodded at me as if to say I deserved what she was about to say. "a good man. Not handsome. A Christian — but not a damned hypocrite — never a hypocrite." She touched her finger to her lips, sat there for a moment thinking. "Of course, I used him, and I remember those nights, too. But I had too — my body told me I had to, and my soul said it too. I remember feeling his body on mine, in mine — and all that time I kept telling myself that when we got to Canada, the moment we get to Canada —." She made a bundle in her hands. "I can't say that what I did haunts me, because it's all now so far behind, but I remember him loving me — yes, here on this farm. I lied myself before. I had to make him think the child already there was his. And I remember wanting to cry, not for him, but for my burden of having to deceive a good man, a man I didn't love." She looked at me, shook her head. "I don't expect your sympathy."

"You *never* loved him?"

"I couldn't let myself love him, even if I wanted to. Heaven was in Ontario, Canada. All I wanted was heaven."

"What did he say when you left him?"

"I never told him."

"You mean you simply walked away?"

"In a letter," she said. "I left him a note three days after I left that horrible farm. Three days. I told him the whole story, that he shouldn't come after me because I'd known what I wanted from the day he'd come here to this back door. I'd known exactly what I wanted." She looked at her open hand, as if there were some scar there, something telling; then she raised it to her face, wiped at the corners of her eyes. "In Canada, I simply disappeared — as if it were still war. I left him, two weeks after we first put down our feet in over there, and I went to find my hero."

She looked up at me, penitent, her eyebrows raised, not so much a smile on her face, but something endearing pulled from a corner of her heart she'd not opened before. "You should not have come," she said. "Maybe even your father would say it — we can get by in this world from day-to-day if we don't have to remember some things."

"My father would say there's forgiveness," I told her.

"Yes, he would," she said.

She sat there at her table, alone in a house with more history than a place should have, and for the first time something unburdened within her threatened the strength of what had kept her energized, alive. Maybe they were not so much different, I thought — my father and this first bride.

"I hadn't even thought about that time," she told me. "I hadn't even thought of your father for years — and years. He was gone."

"I'm sorry," I said.

"And so am I," she said, nodding. "And so am I."

Something broke, something stiff and unyielding and very, very beautiful. For the first time, grief came over her eyes like a shadow. "You tell him that, Professor Versteeg," she said. "You tell your father that before he dies — you tell him Dena Janssens is sorry for what she gave him — that pain."

****

I hadn't gone to that house like the prophet Nathan, to exact some penitence. When I'd come up the lane, I didn't know even the barest outline of the story. But when I left, I'd come to learn more than I'd ever guessed I would. I understood that what she'd told me she wanted my father to know was not only something painfully torn from her own stubborn and courageous heart, but also something my father would want very much to hear — not for himself, not simply to staunch a festering wound of unrequited love.

Both of them were beyond that. But my father the Christian would want to know what she'd told me because it would enable him to leave this earth with hope, eternal hope, for his first bride — all accounts settled. He would want to know that she'd said what she said, not for his sake, but for hers, this woman he probably loved so much he couldn't speak of the pain she'd given him for the rest of his life, pain he himself had covered over with love.

What I've come to believe, now, as I drive back to my father's southern Alberta farm, is that this burden of history I've unearthed, this piece of my father's life I never knew was missing from a puzzle I'd always thought to be no puzzle at all, this story of my father's story will be a gift I bring to his last days on earth. It will not be unsettling, a nightmare arising from ashes long grown cold and blown away in the countless seasons of prairie winds he's endured on land many would question was meant for anything other than buffalo. It will give him peace.

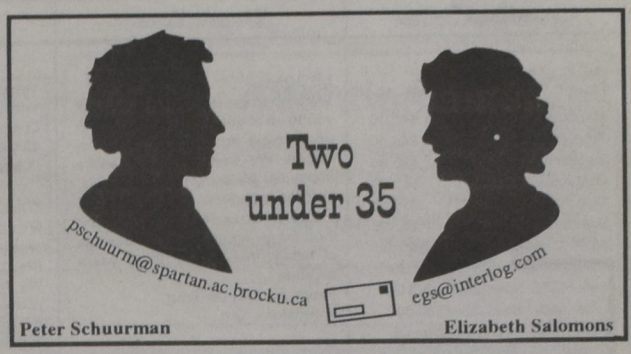
For that reason there is no drama left in this story. I know exactly how he will take the news because I know my father. What he sees before him is an honored appointment with the King of Kings. His final journey began two years ago with the discovery of his cancer. Death has been made flesh in his ravaged body, and while he always knew he was going to die, since he's discovered how, his stoic sense of *when* has only deepened his assurance.

And if I can't give to him what he really wants — something of his son's clean and clear commitment to the Lord he himself has served through so much of a loveless life — I can at least bring him this last gift, the broken heart of a woman who once broke his. But more than that, the penitence of another sinner, one he knew intimately and yet not, a woman he slept with and thought he knew, just as fully as he is known. This historian who happens to be his son is very grateful that he can make this one last road straight for the coming of his Lord.

James Schaap is an English professor at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa. He offers this brand-new story to Christian Courier *readers, who, he believes, "will appreciate it more than any other audience on the continent."*

Comment

Are the (young) people perishing without a vision?



Dear Elizabeth,

In our last e-mail exchange you asked if there were any maps to guide us in a world of infinite choice. We both concluded, I believe, that there aren't any road signs that clearly show us the way forward. On the other hand, we still have to step out in some direction. And ideally, we would do this together, as much as large communities can, rather than each on his or her own. So maybe we don't have a map, but we do need a dream or "vision" — some picture of tomorrow, some set of common goals which help us walk together into the uncertain future in faith. Every generation is handed the legacy of its predecessors in the midst of new challenges presented by the broader culture.

We've talked a lot already about job frustrations, a general climate of pessimism, and the infinite choices that we are confronted with as a generation. We haven't talked about other challenges, like pervasive relativism, family breakdown, and political apathy. Where do we go from here?

Christianity Today recently had a cover story on "Our St. Francis" — Francis Schaeffer. Now for those who struggled with the challenges of the '60s and '70s, it seems like Schaeffer was a real inspiration. He knew the culture, he understood the times, and he gave a clear Christian vision to disillusioned young people. He wasn't perfect, for sure, but to me, reading about it now, it's incredible the number of Christians who saw a way forward in faith because of him.

Maybe we don't have a map, but we do need a dream or "vision" — some picture of tomorrow, some set of common goals which help us walk together into the uncertain future in faith.

I can't think of anyone who is comparable to Francis Schaeffer for our generation. I wonder if our generation is too cynical of leadership anyway — political, religious, whatever — to have a similar leader. But we still need a vision, I think, to help us meet the specific challenges that lie before us, to help us respond to the particular questions that confront us. Not an iron agenda, but a realistic and yet hopeful dream.

There is sort of a vision developing already, mostly in the form of general trends. Young people are more concerned about church unity and breaking down denominational barriers. They are more into "bonding" (deepening friendships) and "service" than they are into theology books.

They prefer active worship over passive, they are more visually literate, they are more definitely North American than European, and they are less rigorously committed to institutions — in attendence, involvement, and financial support. They are more in tune with Canadian culture — more involved in its educational system, and more conversant with its media.

That's not meant to be the last word on that, but I think it gives a hint as to how young people make decisions today. Do you think that's accurate? And while this is what the trend is, is it the best dream or vision? How does that help us meet the challenges mentioned above? What does that mean in terms of our support for Christian schools, other Reformed institutions, our ethnic heritage in general?

Big questions for a small space, I know.

Expectantly,
Peter

Dear Peter:

Hmmmm. I think we've opened up a Pandora's Box here with this particular discussion thread. I thought I asked all the difficult questions last time, but I don't even know how to attempt an answer to the ones you raise. (I guess this is what you call pay-back time.)

I'd agree with your summary of trends influencing our generation, but, for the most part, I'd describe them as positive changes. Seeing the effect of schismatic division on the Reformed community, I'd go as far as to say I don't think theological debate has done our church a whole lot of good lately. I, therefore, would rather express my theology through the communion of the saints — a dynamic, caring, worshipping community — than trying to dot my theological "i"s. Active worship (which in my opinion means much more than the clapping of hands and an occasional responsive reading thrown in here or there) is much healthier than the "comfortable pew" we grew up with. And I strongly feel that cultural and media literacy are as integral to literacy today as the three Rs have been for centuries, and are not an unknown force to be feared.

As far as commitment to Reformed institutions, I believe that when these institutions realize the old-boys'-club approach is doing them a great deal of harm as far as their reaching the next generation, we will see a resurgence of commitment. (And I do see this happening already in some organizations.)

Do the trends you describe formulate our generation's vision? I think a trend is a reflection of much more than a pattern of decision-making and a vision is much broader than a trend. But I also don't know that I'd look for a visionary to guide me. I certainly can't name any. Maybe I'm reflecting the very trends you list, or maybe it's just my independence streak rearing its ugly head, but it seems to me that putting such stock in the teachings of one person or group of persons is exactly what Paul warned against.

So what, then, is the vision our generation should live by? I just asked for a little road map, but maybe my request is too simplistic for our times. Maybe your questions reflect the need for our generation to get beyond its narcissism and think about a world that's bigger than we are, and a generation that will come after us.

A couple of letters back, you borrowed a labelling system to describe three generations of the CRC in North America. The first generation were immigrant survivors, the second, system builders, and we, the third, cultural engagers. If we find these labels useful, maybe they can help us to understand what type of vision our generation is headed towards.

I don't have a vision for the future. Maybe I'm copping out here. What I do know, Peter, is that I was always taught we were never to consider ourselves *reformed,* but to always be *reforming.* I understand that to mean we should be always questioning and re-examining: don't do things because it's always been done that way, but do them because they should be done that way.

I do have the faith you ended your last letter with. And on that I move forward, in community.

Steadfastly,
Elizabeth

Elizabeth Salomons is a freelance editor who lives in Toronto and is a member of First CRC there. Peter Schuurman, is the Christian Reformed Church's chaplain at Brock University. He's a member of Jubilee Fellowship CRC in St. Catharines.

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We want to express a heartfelt thank you to all of you who made our 50th anniversary such a wonderful occasion. We were overwhelmed by the cards, the visits, the phone calls, and the wonderful time we had at our open house. Most of all we thank God for giving us the rich blessings of family, friends and happy years together.
Foppe and Jet De Jong,
Woodstock, Ont.

Birthdays

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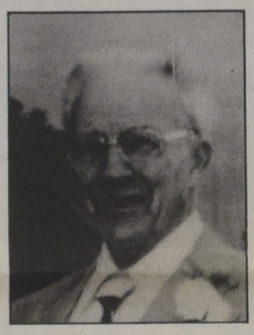

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It is with joy and thanksgiving to God that on Aug. 18, 1997, we may celebrate the 90th birthday of our father, grandfather, and great-grandfather
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He has been for us a kind, generous and loving Pa and Opa. We pray for his continued well-being.
Open house will be held, D.V., on Aug. 16, 1997, from 2-4 p.m., at Holland Chr. Homes, Brampton, Ont.
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Anniversaries

1972 August 4 1997
With joy and thanksgiving to the Lord, we celebrate the 25th anniversary of our parents
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(nee HOVIUS)
"Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever" (Ps. 125:1).
We thank God for his faithfulness to you in the past and we pray that he will continue to uphold and bless you in the years to come.
With love from your children:
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Sharon & Craig (friend)
Jeff
Brenda
Kevin
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the Netherlands Canada
1947 1997
On Tuesday, Aug. 12, 1997, we hope to celebrate with our parents
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VANDERMOLEN
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Jane & Frank Vanderbeld — Corunna, Ont.
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VENEMA
(nee KALMINK)
We pray that God will continue to bless and keep them in their future together.
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Keith, Alan, Mark
Mary & Harry DeVries — Ancaster, Ont.
Tim, Laura, Marie
Robert — Manhattan, Mont.
L.J., Lynzie, Bryen
Carolyn & Rob — Caledonia, Ont.
Eric, Gregory, Ryan
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Anniversaries

July 29
50th wedding anniversary!
MR. and MRS.
JAN VANDERWAL
We are thankful to God that on July 29, 1997, we were able to celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary.

40th anniversary
Aug. 8, 1997
KLAAS and MARGARET
IJZERMAN
(nee SPOELSTRA)
With joy and thanks to the Lord we celebrate the 40th wedding anniversary of our parents. May God continue to bless you with health and happiness for many years to come.
With love from your family:
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Margaret, Erika
Anthony & Sue IJzerman — Brampton, Ont.
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Ralph & Sara Marie Pot — Smithville, Ont.
David — Ancaster, Ont.
Jessica — Ancaster, Ont.
Rhoda — Ancaster, Ont.
Our extended families grieve her sudden death.
Richard & Alida Poort — Woodstock, Ont.
Kryn & Willy Van Oostveen — Lakeside, Ont.
Case & Trudy De Wit — Embro, Ont.
Albert & Jean VanderLaan — Exeter, Ont.
John De Wit — Christian Horizons, Woodstock, Ont.
Dan & Marie Lievaart — Taber, Alta.
Harry & Mary De Jonge — London, Ont.
Jerry & Mary De Jonge — Nanticoke, Ont.
Bert & Linda Renkema — Londesboro, Ont.
Your prayers are asked for our parents:
Neeltje De Wit — Embro, Ont.
Henry & Bernarda De Jonge — Woodstock, Ont.
Her funeral took place on July 4, 1997, in the Ancaster Chr. Ref. Church.
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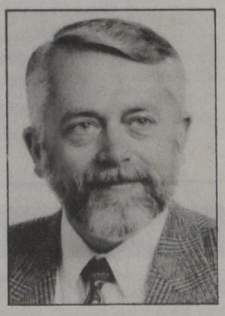
Classifieds

Miscellaneous	Miscellaneous	Job Opportunities	Job Opportunities	Miscellaneous

Announcement



The Board of Directors of Christian Stewardship Services (CSS) is pleased to announce the appointment of **Mr. Henry Eygenraam** CFP, CLU, Ch.F.C. (Certified Financial Planner, Chartered Life Underwriter, Chartered Financial Consultant) to the position of Executive Director of CSS, effective July 21, 1997.

Henry has been a representative and manager with London Life for the past 28 years. He has demonstrated leadership in his industry through involvement in various boards and committees.

Henry's Christian vision for stewardship and his enthusiasm for the mission of CSS were key factors in the board's decision to hire him. He has played significant roles in Christian organization boards in the past, most recently the board of Toronto District Christian High School where he was chair for two and a half years.

We look forward to working with Henry over the coming years as we continue to develop the organization that has been such a success under the leadership of Mr. Harry Houtman, its first executive director, who recently moved on to work with Christian Blind Mission International. We commend both of them to you for your prayers.

CALVIN College

Calvin College and **Calvin Theological Seminary** seek applicants for a **Curator.** The Curator is responsible for the acquisition, organization, maintenance and client use of the official archives of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Qualifications include a commitment to the Reformed faith; a knowledge of the Christian Reformed Church, Calvin College, Calvin Theological Seminary and the constituency of these institutions; an advanced degree (MA) in Archival Science is strongly encouraged; computer literacy and a strong interest (MA-level-preparation) in an academic area such as history, theology, literature, political science or philosophy are required; must either know or be willing to learn the Dutch language; exhibit a creative vision and talent for developing special programs; interest and ability in promoting the work of the collections.

Candidates should submit a resume, including the names and telephone numbers of three references by **Sept. 1, 1997,** to: **Connie Bellows, Director of Human Resources, Calvin College, 3201 Burton SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546.**

RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS OF STROKE WHEN YOU SEE THEM.

✓ **VISION PROBLEMS**
Sudden loss of vision, particularly in one eye or double vision

✓ **HEADACHES**
Sudden, severe and unusual headaches

✓ **WEAKNESS**
Sudden weakness, numbness and/or tingling in the face, arm or leg

✓ **TROUBLE SPEAKING**
Temporary loss of speech or trouble understanding speech

✓ **DIZZINESS**
Unsteadiness or sudden falls, especially with any of the above signs

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For more information, contact your local Heart and Stroke Foundation office.

NC

Job Opportunities

Positions Available

We are a growing Hi-Tech Company with national and global expansion plan, now seeking individuals for the following positions.

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We offer an attractive salary commensurate with experience.

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Applicants are requested to send a complete resume and three (3) letters of reference by **August 8, 1997,** to:

Dr. Elaine Botha, Vice President (Academic)
Redeemer College, 777 Hwy. 53 E.,
Ancaster, ON L9K 1J4
(905) 648-2134 fax; e-mail ebotha@redeemer.on.ca

Redeemer College
A Christian University College

Events

Lakewood Christian Campground

Come to Lakewood Christian Campground on **Thursday, August 21, 1997,** for **SENIOR DAY.** Coffee will be ready, along with goodies. The program will begin at **10 a.m.** The **speaker** will be **Rev. Eric Pennings** from Strathroy, Ont. Come and meet old friends, enjoy the program and games. Remember to bring your lunch and lawn chair.

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U kunt zich nu abonneren op deze prekendienst, b.v.:

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b) twee cassettes maandelijks;
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Luister naar het programma **Zingend Geloven**

Toronto: CHIN FM 101
Elke Zaterdag 8:00 a.m.

Belleville: CJLX-FM 92.3 FM
Zondag 7:00 p.m.

Kingston: CFRC-FM 101.9 FM
Zondag 12:00 middag

Classifieds

Events

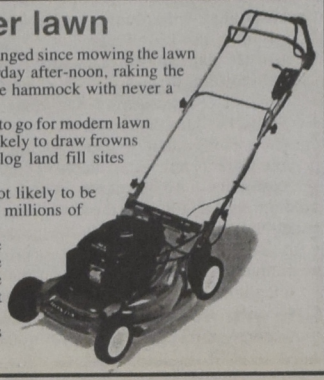
Calendar of Events

Please submit only brief items. Placement is subject to space availability. Lengthy, multiple-event announcements will be rejected. We reserve the right to edit the material and to charge a nominal, per issue fee per item inserted.

To Aug.1 Summer school at Wycliffe College and the ICS, **Toronto**, Ont. For brochure and registration details contact Chris Barrigar at (416) 979-2870, fax (416) 979-5668 or e-mail: c.barrigar@utoronto.ca. (#)

Aug. 17 Dutch worship service led by Rev. P. Van Egmond, 3 p.m., CRC, **Ancaster**, Ont.

Mulching your way to a healthier lawn



(NC)—Think you know how to cut the grass? Think again. Things have changed since mowing the lawn was as simple as running the mower back and forth a few times on Saturday after-noon, raking the clippings into piles and bagging them for pickup, then heading back to the hammock with never a grassy thought for another week.

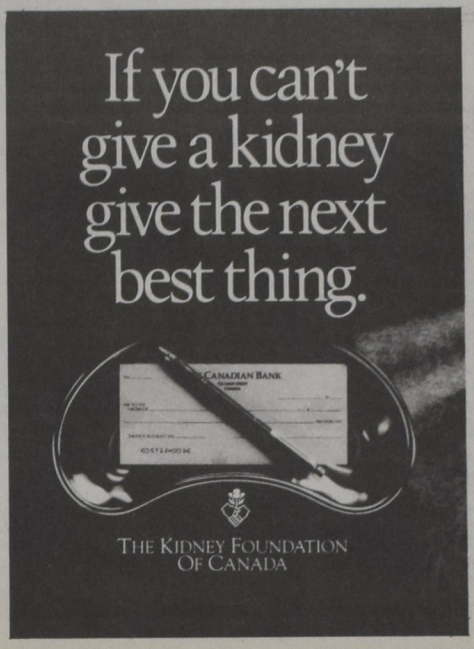
Today a growing environmental awareness has made mulching the way to go for modern lawn maintenance. In most municipalities, curbside bags of grass clippings are likely to draw frowns from your neighbours while they wait in vain for removal—the bags clog land fill sites because lack of air inhibits decomposition of the grass.

Unfortunately, the old lawnmower that served so well in the past is not likely to be much use in the mulching department. Prime lawn mulch is made up of millions of tiny bits of grass—tiny enough to spread evenly and decompose rapidly.

Most lawnmower manufacturers achieve this result by closing off the chute at the side or rear of the mower, thereby keeping the cut grass inside the mower deck longer. Mulching mowers made by Honda utilize a unique tilted deck and twin blades in a 6-step mulching process to ensure fast decomposition of the clippings.

Once made into mulch, this throwaway nuisance of yesteryear becomes a valuable plant resource for the perfect lawn of the future.

Miscellaneous



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Reformed Faith Witness, the new publisher of *Christian Courier*, is a charitable organization which received tax exempt status from Revenue Canada.

Please consider making a financial gift for 1997. All contributions will be used to help *Christian Courier* and the cause of Reformed Christian journalism. Send your cheque and complete the coupon below and we will issue an official receipt. Thank you very much!

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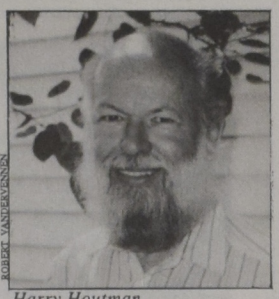
Houtman leaves Christian Stewardship Services

Robert VanderVennen

TORONTO — After serving for 20 years as the only executive director Christian Stewardship Services has had, Harry Houtman has left the agency to become a planned giving consultant for Christian Blind Mission International. Differences with the board of CSS and some of the Christian Reformed denominational agencies have led to his departure.



ROBERT VANDERVENNEN

Harry Houtman

In the early 1970s Houtman and others saw the need for a service that CSS was organized to meet. It has 35 agency members, including all the major agencies of the Christian Reformed Church. Houtman was appointed as its first full-time staff member in July 1977.

Two objectives

CSS has always had two objectives. One is to offer objective advice to people on Christian stewardly planning for their estates. The other is to hold before people the wisdom and good stewardship of planning to make financial donations to Christian ministries from their assets, often from their wills.

Because CSS does not ask for money for its own purposes, thousands of people have felt free to disclose to him all their financial assets, says Houtman. This has made it possible for him to offer them creative and stewardly advice. Persons from large Christian ministries asking for planned giving to their particular agency do not find that openness, he says.

There was little activity of this sort in the 1970s, says Houtman, because none of the Christian agencies could afford to place on its staff a person to solicit donations from assets.

The ministry of CSS has gone extremely well in these 20 years, says Houtman. Although CSS does not ask people to tell them how much money they have set aside in their wills for charities, CSS knows that at least $100 million has been so designated. A great deal more is specified in wills that CSS does not know about. Each year Houtman has helped about 350 to 400 individuals and couples plan for charitable donations from their wills.

In addition, in recent years about $800,000 per year has been donated directly to Christian agencies as a result of the work of CSS. It also handles annuities payable to the agencies.

One intriguing idea from CSS is that people are able to identify in their wills a certain amount to be donated to CSS, and then in a letter to the CSS board direct the amounts which are to be paid to certain specific agencies. This way the donors can change the way they wish to have their charitable donations divided by a letter to CSS, without needing to change their wills. In this way CSS is now the beneficiary, on behalf of other ministries, in several thousand wills.

Christian Stewardship Services itself does not receive donation money, but it handles donations on behalf of its member agencies. It currently is holding assets for charities of about $13 million, which it invests in mortgages and government bonds.

Give as to your kids

Another interesting idea advocated by CSS is for people to designate that a sum of money be given to charities which is equal to the money each child will receive. For example, a couple that has three children may specify that the assets be divided four ways, with the fourth part going to various Christian ministries in a manner specified in a separate letter to CSS.

Houtman continues to be the administrator for the Christian Reformed Church Extension Fund, even though he has now left CSS. The extension fund invites people to lend it money and to set up RRSP programs, the money from which can be loaned to churches and Christian schools which need it for capital development.

Beneficial to both

This extension fund was developed by Houtman and others in 1976 from an earlier fund of Classis Toronto of the CRC. This fund is Canada-wide and it is administered by Houtman under a board that is accountable to Classis Toronto of the Christian Reformed Church.

Money received by the loan fund and the RRSP fund is loaned to churches and Christian schools at close to the bank prime rate, which is a much better interest rate than can be found elsewhere. The interest rate paid to lenders is one quarter or one half per cent lower, which is a much better rate than lenders can get most other places. Commercial RRSP programs are generally less advantageous to investors than is the extension fund RRSP program.

At present the CRC Extension Fund holds over $25 million in its RRSP program and over $6 million in its loan fund. Currently investors are paid four per cent per year and borrowers pay 4.5 per cent.

World Bank considers including religion in loan policies

Robert VanderVennen

TORONTO — The World Bank is moving toward looking beyond the economic impact of its loans to poor countries to including how loans have an impact on religious faith, the lives of poor people and their families.

A recent meeting was called by bank president James Wolfensohn at which 15 representatives of nine world religions and 19 World Bank staff members met to prepare for a 1998 consultation of the World Bank and religious leaders.

The World Bank has been severely criticized in recent years because its policies and loans to poor countries have seemed to consider only economics, and they have appeared to be designed as capitalist programs aimed chiefly to benefit Western banks at the expense of impoverished people.

Typical World Bank requirements for loans call for the nation sell off the companies it owns. But there are no buyers except the rich in the country, who buy at fire sale prices. In Brazil, for example, a nationally owned mining company's selling price was reduced 19 times before it was sold.

Drastic changes

What follows these sales is a drastic reduction of the workforce and workers who can't find other jobs. Governments are forced to cut back drastically so that hundreds of thousands become unemployed. World Bank restructuring requires governments to slash their budgets; then health care becomes nonexistent for the poor, schools are closed, roads deteriorate, so does the environment, and so on. Fields of food to feed the poor now grow coffee for export, so the country can make its high debt payments.

All these "structural adjustment programs" are hardest on children, and also on women and indigenous people. UNICEF estimates that each year 500,000 children die as a result of the foreign debt crisis.

Wolfensohn wants to see a radical shakeup at the World Bank. He wants the bank to pay attention to more than economics. Key to this is the religious dynamic of the people the bank serves, an aspect to which banks and governments seem to be blind. At the meeting it was recognized that the bank is not a "value-free" organization.

The World Bank was urged to accept its responsibility to care for the poor and treat people as worthy human beings, not just economic pawns. It was recognized that religious groups usually find themselves nearest the groups which have been hurt the most by the World Bank's policies. It was pointed out that in some countries today, as in Bosnia, the religious communities are in a position to make or break the bank's reconstruction and development work. In other countries, such as those with Islamic governments, religious faith and government are intertwined.

An important outcome of this meeting is expected to be the inclusion of religious, spiritual and cultural aspects in the World Bank's assessments. Religious people need to help answer the question of what progress and development really are. The bank and people of religious faith need to act together on the basic of common values, it was said. Further meetings will be called by the World Bank before the 1998 consultation. Members of each faith group were asked to choose some projects or programs as examples of how religious values can be rooted in practical projects on the ground.

News Digest

Where's the British beef?

LONDON, U.K. — British beef will soon be back on the menu at Britain's McDonald's restaurants, as the company ends its 15-month ban on its use in hamburgers, the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* reports. The ban was the result of last year's "mad cow disease" scare in Britain.

The decision by McDonald's followed consumer surveys which showed that 74 per cent of its customers favored the return of British beef. Before it introduced the ban, McDonald's in Britain bought about half its beef, worth £30 million a year, from British producers. The company expects this level to be resumed.

The British government welcomed the move, but McDonald's was criticized by microbiologist Richard Lacey, who warns that all beef, British or foreign, still poses a risk to humans.

Off the beaten track

TORQUAY, U.K. — Police in the town of Torquay, England, recently intervened to halt the confused wanderings of a Japanese tourist who assumed she was in a far different place. She hadn't made herself quite clear in London when asking directions to Turkey, reports the *Christian Science Monitor.*

One long train ride later, she got off in the town that served as the inspiration for the TV series "Fawlty Towers," looking for bazaars and minarets. She returned to London and continued her trip by plane.

Church abuzz in Nova Scotia

NEW GLASGOW, Nova Scotia (CP) — Recently, a church in New Glasgow was buzzing with excitement. Moments before a concert began at the church, a massive swarm of bees entered the building. The chief usher and others sealed off the side entrance to the church and several stairwells, keeping the bees away from the concert area. The concert went ahead as scheduled.

Later on, a local beekeeper found the bees buzzing around in a nearby tree and lured 25,000 of them into an artificial hive.